

PROPERTY OF
THE CHURCH ON THE WAY

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devotional study of all the symbols in
the first chapters of the Book of the

By Rev. J. J. Ross, D.D.

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Pearls from Patmos

A Spiritual and Devotional Study of
all the Symbols in the First Chapters
of the Book of the Revelation :: ::

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By

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To my son
JOHN MOORE GRAHAM ROSS,
this book is
affectionately and gratefully
dedicated

Introduction

A VERY usual formula for "grace before meat" is "For what we are about to receive, may the Lord make us truly thankful," and in the light of this thought it is at once a privilege and a duty to commend this work by Dr. Ross. Readers will undoubtedly feel "truly thankful" on several grounds as they give this book their attention.

In the first place, it is an admirable illustration of a form of preaching which is far too rare in the present day, that of exposition. On every hand congregations are asking for more expository sermons, instead of having subjects prefaced by texts used either as mottoes or as merely formal introductions to the theme. Christian people long for a more thorough knowledge of the Word of God in a threefold way showing (1) what it contains; (2) what it means; (3) what it teaches. The greatest preachers, like Maclaren, Parker, and many more, have always emphasized and expounded Scripture and set before their people Divine Truth. Inasmuch as God's Word is "living and powerful" it is obvious that only by expository sermons will the most valuable spiritual work of the preacher be done. There are far too few volumes

of patient, detailed exegesis and application of Scripture, and on this account alone, Dr. Ross' book is worthy of all praise.

Another reason for thankfulness is that the method of treating the subject of this book is novel and suggestive. There are many works available dealing with the messages to the Seven Churches, but Dr. Ross takes a new line, and in presenting together the corresponding parts of each letter, he enables the reader and student to look at the subject from a fresh standpoint.

Yet again, thankfulness will be elicited because of the character of the exposition in its three welcome features of intellectual sanity, definite spirituality and thorough practicalness. These are essential in any treatment of Scripture, but are, perhaps, specially welcome in connection with a book like the Revelation.

Not least of all, the reader will be grateful for the way in which the teaching is illustrated and enforced by evident personal and pastoral experience, which cannot fail to be of real value.

For these reasons among others, I most heartily and without qualification commend these forceful pages to the earnest attention of all who desire and enjoy Scripture exposition, ably presented, aptly illustrated, and freshly applied.

W. H. GRIFFITH THOMAS.

Philadelphia, Pa.

Preface

IN order to a clear understanding of the chapters which compose this volume, it is necessary to say something about the Book out of which they have been taken. The Book of the Revelation, or the Unveiling, contains the final message of the Risen Christ to men, and it differs in some respects from all the other Books which make up the Divine Library. John received this Book directly from the Glorified Lord about sixty years after His Ascension to Glory. No Book has been more neglected than this Revelation of Christ, and therefore, no Book is so little understood, and yet it is the only one that opens with a threefold benediction of blessing, upon those who read, those who hear, and those who keep the things that are symbolically unveiled therein.

In the Book of the Revelation we have a sublime series of pictures of God's dealings with this earth from the beginning to the consummation of all things. In the symbols used, we find ourselves back in the realm of the Old Testament Scriptures. Jehovah is described as "Him which is, and which was, and which is to come." The Holy Spirit is described in the infinite holiness of His character,

and the infinite perfection of His activity, by the symbolism of number, the seven Spirits, Who is before the throne and proceeds to earth from the throne. In the Book, Jesus, the Sacrificial Lamb, is the "faithful witness, the first begotten from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth"; while the Church, loved and loosed from sin, is made a kingdom of priests glorified forevermore. Throughout the Book, God the Father is revealed as supreme in the government of the universe, the Holy Spirit in the perfection of His activity, the light and energy of that government, and the Risen Christ as the faithful and true Witness, and supreme Prince of the kings of the earth.

The prospect in the Book of the Revelation is much larger than the Hebrew kingdom, much larger than the Church of Christ, for it has respect not only to the relation of God as Father to the company of the saved, whether Jews or Gentiles, but to His larger relation as King of the whole earth. In this Book, we have God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, the Triune Jehovah, in His relation to His dominion, government, rule, or kingdom in and over the whole universe which He has created, and which He directs. Within this dominion of God, the whole human family is included. In this Book also, as nowhere else, the final stages of the work of God with humanity are clearly set forth. The complete and final overthrow of evil is assured, and the glorious

setting up and manifestation of the Divine Kingdom over men is guaranteed. Further, it makes plain that that final overthrow and that setting up will be fully realized through Jesus Christ as the anointed King.

The purpose of the "Pearls from Patmos" is to bring out the precious truths contained in the symbols used in the first three chapters of this wonderful Book. How successful the author has been in this effort is left to the judgment of the devout, spiritual student of this sublime prophecy. This book is sent forth with the believing prayer that God may bless its messages to the enrichment of the spiritual life of many of His own people.

In the preparation of these chapters, the author was indebted to F. W. Grant, Joseph A. Seiss, D. D., LL. D., G. Campbell Morgan, D. D., Charles C. Whiting, M. A., B. D., William Milligan, D. D., Alexander Maclaren, D. D., Litt. D., W. H. Griffith Thomas, D. D., and W. M. Ramsey, D. C. L., Litt. D., LL. D., Professor of Humanity in the University of Aberdeen.

J. J. R.

Boston, Mass.

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PART I
THE PEARLY PORTAL

I

THE PEARLY PORTAL

(*Revelation 1: 1-3.*)

THESE verses give us the Pearly Portal into the Book of the Revelation. They are meant to advise the reader as to that with which the Author is about to deal, and to prepare him to appreciate what is to follow. In this Portal we have the key that gives free access into the secrets unfolded. There are several points with which these verses deal. We must distinguish, name, and consider them in order, for the purpose of a proper understanding and appreciation of the revelation made. We will take each one of these as they are presented and note what they have to say respectively, and relatively, about the Book we are to study.

I. THE AUTHOR

The first item of importance presented to us in this Pearly Portal or Divine Preface is the Author of the Revelation. These verses represent this Book as the gift of the Father to Christ. The passage reads, "The Revelation of Jesus Christ which *God gave unto him.*" Some understand this gift in the sense of *made known to*, but to so un-

derstand it, is to compromise the Deity of our Lord. This Book was not a piece of information of which Christ was ignorant up to the time of His Exaltation by the Father. Christ knew perfectly the contents of this Book before, but at the time of His Exaltation, God authorized Him to "shew," manifest, make known, or disclose those contents to His servants. This is not a revelation of the person, offices, and work of Christ, but rather a revelation of certain events, and circumstances in the history of the world, made known by Christ. How did Christ "shew" these things to the servants of God? The passage says, "And he," that is, God the Father, "sent and signified it by his angel." Who is this angel, or messenger of the Father? It is not difficult to identify Him. In one place (8:2-6), He is seen as the angel, the high-priest serving at the altar. It is commonly believed by Bible students that this angel is Christ Himself. Again He appears in chapter nineteen, verses 9, 10. In verse six of that chapter, He is called "The Lord God Omnipotent." The people there are called upon to "Give honour to *him*." Then said John, "And he," that is, the angel, "saith unto me, write, Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb." And He saith unto me, "These are the true sayings of God." And I fell at His feet to worship Him. That is, John fell down at the feet of the angel to present unto the angel the homage and praise of his

heart. But the angel refused such homage and praise, and rebuked John for even thinking of presenting it. The angel said, "See thou do it not," the reason being "I am thy servant and of thy brethren that have the testimony of Jesus; worship God." You will notice that the angel is first "the Lord God Omnipotent," and He becomes the "Fellow Servant" of both John and those that have and declare the testimony of Jesus. This angel is also presented to us in the twenty-second chapter (vs. 6-21). We will quote some of the statements of this angel in that chapter. He said, "These sayings are faithful and true: and the Lord God of the Holy Prophets sent his angel to shew unto his servant the things which must shortly be done." Then the angel said, "Behold I come quickly: Blessed is he that keepeth the sayings of the prophecy of this book." When John heard these things, he was enraptured by them, and as before, fell down at the angel's feet to worship. A second time, the angel refused the worship offered by John and rebuked him for thinking of such a thing, giving as the reason for such refusal, the same as before, "I am thy fellow-servant and of the brethren the prophets, and of them who keep the sayings of this book: Worship God." From this statement on, the angel becomes speaker throughout. In what He says, we cannot mistake who He is. He declares, "I come quickly." "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end,

the first and the last." "I Jesus." "I am the root and the offspring of David, the bright and morning star, and surely I come quickly." The prayer of the Church to the angel who is thus speaking is, "Even so, Come, Lord Jesus." From these references and quotations, it is clear that "his angel," who made known this Book, is none other than Jesus Christ Himself.

But it will be asked, How then did Christ refuse the offered worship of John as set forth in those passages? In making the contents of this Book known to God's servants, the Lord is acting and working as a servant, a fellow-servant of John, and also a fellow-servant of all who possess and declare the testimony of Jesus. As a servant, the Lord Jesus Christ refused worship on the part of man. It was as a servant that John was tempted to worship Him. A servant is not to be worshipped. Jesus will only accept worship as the Lord God Omnipotent, and as John did not present Him worship as the Lord God Omnipotent, He refused this act of adoration on the part of John and rebuked him for it.

What we have here in this Book is not a disclosure of the glorious person, work, and offices of Christ, but rather a revealment of which Christ is the Author. The office of Christ as the angel of God was to form the connection between John's senses and the things that he was to describe, causing to pass in review before Him much of what had

already taken place, what was taking place at that moment, and especially what would take place in the future. But when God tells us that what is here set forth was thus made known to John, we will persist in referring every one of these visions, with all that John saw and heard, to the intervention and work of the exalted Lord as the messenger of Jehovah. Jesus is then the Author of the Book of Revelation. In the Gospel by Matthew, we have a Revelation of Christ as the King; in the Gospel by Mark, we have the Revelation of Christ as the Servant; in the Gospel by Luke, we have the Revelation of Christ as the Man; in the Gospel by John, we have a Revelation of Christ as the Son of God. In these Books, Christ is the theme of each, but He is not, in one sense, their Author. There is much in the Book of the Revelation of the glorious person, work, and office of Christ, but He is not the theme of the Book. What that theme is, we shall see later.

II. THE READERS

The next thing to notice in this Divine Preface is the Readers of this Book. They are spoken of as "Servants." "The Revelation of Jesus Christ which God gave unto him, to shew unto his *servants*." The title "servants" is used nine different times in the Book of the Revelation (1: 1; 2: 20; 7: 3; 10: 7; 11: 18; 19: 2, 5; 22: 3, 6). The servants are spoken of as the sealed ones of God,

and all those who love His person, both small and great. These servants, at the time of writing, constituted the seven churches specified as Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea. All Christ's own are God's servants. The Book of the Revelation is addressed to God's people as God's servants, and is distinctively a servant's Book. In order to have the title to apprehend the things that are here revealed, it is important that we should understand it must be with a spirit of service in our hearts. All the things made known in this Book have to do with service. They are not merely things to excite the imagination, inform the intellect, or even to illumine the soul with glory; but they are specially, and distinctively things that have practically to do with the path of service. So to speak, they are the Revelation of the path of service that leads across the field. Instead of the Revelation being a Book of dreams, or mere visions, there is nothing more practical than what we have in it. The readers, the recipients of this wonderful Book, are the people of God at all times, of all ages, and of all places, who have the spirit of service.

III. THE WRITER

We have seen the Author and the Readers of the Book, and now let us look at its Writer, or Amanuensis. The passage says that God "sent and signified it unto his servant John: who bare

record of the Word of God and of the testimony of Jesus Christ and of all things that he saw." Much is to be learned of John from the fourth Gospel. We learn from it that he was a disciple of John the Baptist (John 1: 35); that he was one of the first six disciples called by the Lord in His early ministry in Judea (vs. 37-51); and that he was present at all the scenes which he describes in his Gospel. We find later that he had a home in Jerusalem, and was acquainted with many there. To that home he took Mary, the mother of Jesus, whom the dying Saviour entrusted to his care (19: 26, 27). Much more also we learn of him, and of his history, for his Gospel is a kind of spiritual autobiography, a record of the growth of his faith, and of the way in which his eyes were opened to see the glory of the Lord, until his faith actually became vision. According to his Gospel, he was in the inner circle of the disciples, indeed, nearest of them all to Jesus, "the disciple whom Jesus loved," and, because of that love, became the apostle of love.

In the Book of the Revelation, there are some important witnesses to the character and ministry of John. He is spoken of as God's servant, or bond slave (22:16). He is described as Christ's Angel or Messenger. What Christ was to God the Father, John was to Jesus Christ the Son. As the Father had "sent" Christ, even so had Christ "sent" and authorized John. John describes himself in the Revelation (1: 9) as the brother and

companion of those in tribulation, "and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ." In the communication of the Revelation to the Church, John is singled out of all men as capable of receiving the message and making it known to others. He is therefore, of all men, the one the Lord has in mind in this passage, the reason being that he was near to Christ and could be trusted by Christ. He was willing to suffer whatever was coming to him, for the testimony of Jesus. He was the one who attested the Word of God in his Gospel, and bore unmistakable witness of the Risen, Human, and Glorified Christ in his epistle. The Gospel by John is occupied with witnessing to Jesus as the Son of God. The first chapter gives the only full account which the Scriptures contain respecting the preëxistence of the Word in the Godhead, and the sameness of that Word with Him who was born of Mary, tabernacled in flesh, and was called Jesus of Nazareth. This was the way in which John bore "record of the Word of God." We find the same thing presented in the first chapter of John's first epistle when he says, "That which was born from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled of the Word of Life, declare we unto you." The first and second epistles of John constitute arguments against false teachers who had gone abroad at that time. These arguments were a testimony that Jesus, in resur-

rection life, is still the Word of God, the only Christ, the human Saviour, and the only Son of God. John was the one who, in a special sense, attested Christ as the Son of God in mortal human form, and the Son of God in glorified humanity. He claimed that Christ was the only Divine Saviour and Redeemer of men. Because of the way in which he attested Christ and suffered for that testimony, he is found worthy by Christ to receive and to communicate the contents of the Book of the Revelation. In this, he is a sample and an example of all true believers in Christ to-day. On account of his faithfulness to Christ in giving testimony for Him throughout Asia Minor, a Province under the Roman Empire, John was banished to the Island of Patmos, where, according to Professor Ramsey, he suffered in exile for a period of eighteen months. It was during this period of exile that he was given the series of visions which constitute the Book of the Revelation. Had it not been for the exile of John to the Island of Patmos, perhaps we might not have had the Book of the Revelation given to us at all.

IV. THE THEME

We have seen the Author, and the Readers and Writer of this Book, and now let us look at its Theme. It is very important that students of Revelation should understand what this theme really is. As I said, some tell us that the theme

is Christ, in His glorious person, offices, work, and especially His Second Advent. Let it be understood that there is very much about Christ in this Book, but He is not specifically its theme. It is spoken of as "the Revelation of Jesus Christ," but it does not mean a Revelation in which Christ is unveiled, or disclosed, but rather a Revelation, or manifestation of which Christ is the Revealer. The Exalted Man, Christ Jesus, is here represented in His glorified state, as receiving from God the Father, by virtue of His hypostatical union with Him, a Revelation, which He makes known to God's servants, His Church. If Christ be not the substance, but rather the Author of the Revelation made in this sublime Book, then what is the subject of the Revelation made? In other words, What is the Book about? This introduction does not leave us in the dark regarding the correct answer to this question. The Book is an unveiling of "Things." The word "*Things*" in this brief and unique introduction is employed three different times. They are "*Things* that must shortly come to pass," "all *Things* that He saw," and "*Things* that are written therein." In the nineteenth verse of this first chapter, John is told to write "The *things* which thou hast seen, and the *things* which are, and the *things* which shall be hereafter." Then again (22: 8) we hear the writer of this Book saying, "I, John, saw these *things* and heard them." They were *things* therefore of

which John was both an eye and an ear witness. Further, the Risen Lord becomes the speaker (22: 18-20) and declares, "I, Jesus, have sent mine angel to testify to you these *things* unto the churches." From the beginning to the end of the Book, we hear of "THINGS," "THINGS," "THINGS." The Book then is a Revelation, the final and complete Revelation made of Jesus Christ Himself, of "THINGS."

But the question is immediately raised, "What are things?" Modernly and generally speaking, a thing is whatever exists, or is conceived to exist as a separate entity; whatever may be spoken or thought of; an inanimate object, a creature, a transaction, a circumstance, or an event. Sometimes the word is applied to men and animals in pity, contempt, tenderness, or admiration. But this is not exactly the meaning of the word "*Things*" as employed in the Revelation. In another passage (1 Cor. 2: 9-14), we read about "The *things* which God hath prepared for them that love him," "The deep *things* of God," "The *things* of God knoweth no man," "The *things* freely given to us of God," and "the *things*" which are only revealed to saved men and women by the Spirit of God. Plainly, "Things" is a short way of saying "Thinkings." Everything was first a thought. This world before it became a thing, visible and tangible, was a thought in the mind of Jehovah. Every cathedral that has ever been built was a

thought in the mind of the architect, before it became a thing in the possession of the builder. Every book of poems was at first a thought in the author's mind. The "*Things*" unveiled in the Book of the Revelation are God's thinkings, God's thoughts. But God's thoughts are realities. They are not mere myths, but things. The things, then, so frequently mentioned in this Book, are God's thoughts, plans, and purposes, revealed or expressed in circumstances, and events in the past, present, and especially, and more largely, in the future history of the race. One has said that "It is the peculiar excellence of this Book that it comprises a perfect compendium of events, or things, widely differing; things close at hand, far off and between the two; things great and little; things destroying and saving; things from old prophecies and new; things long and short, and these interwoven with another, and things opposed and mutually agreeing; things mutually involving and evolving one another; so that in no book more than in this, would the addition or the taking away of a single word, or clause, have the effect of marring the sense of the context, and the comparison of passages together."

Notice that the things, or events, unfolded in this Book must "shortly," speedily, or soon come to pass. This it mentioned twice, first in the Preface, and then in the conclusion of the Book (22: 6). When Christ said the events He was

about to unfold would soon become history, He meant exactly what He declared. Many of the events prophesied in the Revelation at the writing of the Book, and according to human computation, were near. In fact, many of them had been fulfilled already, some were being fulfilled at the time of writing, and others of them lay near and far in the future. Two thousand years of the history of these events now lie behind us. The events here predicted are events in the current of which we are now living, not events that are nearly coming to pass at some indefinite time beyond us. We are somewhere in the current of them, but just exactly where, we may have to determine for ourselves. If we cannot put our foot down on the exact spot where we are in the midst of these events, it will not be of less importance to look at the events which are behind us, as well as the events that are still before us. They are all connected. The present is the issue of the past, and contains within itself the seed of the future. If we would be wise concerning the whole current of events in this world's history, we must trace the beginning of them and follow them through to their end. The means of doing this is in the sublime Book before us. How immensely valuable, and how intensely interesting, therefore, it must be!

V. THE STYLE

The style of the Revelation is also placed before

us in this Divine Preface. "He sent and *signified* it." This is the only place where the word "signified" is used in the Book of the Revelation. We must note the significance of that word carefully, for it is the key to the character of what the Book of the Revelation contains. Expositors generally have made mistakes in presenting the character of the Book, by not noticing the significance of this word. To "signify" a thing is to make it known, explain, or unveil it by signs, figures, symbols, or parables. The events which John saw, he made known by pictures. The Revelation is essentially a vision, a parable, of things, of events, which in themselves are meant to be enigmatic. In fact, the picture or parabolic style of the Revelation is so clear that it is hard to understand how any student of the Book should so fail to realize this, as to insist upon absolute literacy anywhere. In heaven itself, we find "A lamb as it had been slain." At once we know who is meant by that. Yes, but nevertheless, what is the style of language here? Is it literal, or is it figurative? In this first chapter, Christ Himself is symbolically described. In the "New Jerusalem," what is meant by the foundations of precious stones, the river and the tree of life, the gates of pearl, and the streets of gold like unto transparent glass? We know indeed, while it does not lessen our wonder, that there are those who take all these things according to the simple letter that we read; but surely it is plain

that here also the Apostle's words are true, that "We see yet through a glass darkly," or, as the word really means, "In a riddle, an enigma." We see not yet "face to face." Only in this manner, have the things spoken their proper dignity, their spirituality and fullness of blessing for us. We may wish perhaps that they were somewhat plainer. God invites us by these apparent difficulties, and makes us seek more carefully, to possess ourselves of what is revealed for us, and therefore given to us by His wondrous grace. The symbolic, or parabolic, always enshrines the truth, while it puts a veil over it, a veil which itself may attract and should attract the heart of His people to learn what is hidden behind it. This veil is meant to invite, not to discourage investigation, at the same time it requires exercise before God, and earnestness of spirit on the part of those who would penetrate behind it. The style of this Book is then symbolic, and resembles the prophecies of Daniel. In Daniel, however, the symbols are generally explained. Here, their interpretation is usually left to be gathered from other portions of Scripture. The symbols are usually taken from the Old Testament and are of a great variety. That the reader may know what some of these symbols are, let us select a list and classify them.

There is the symbolism of number, such as three, the number of the Trinity; four, the number of creation. In the Book, we have four living

creatures, the four winds of heaven, the four corners of the earth, and the four divisions of time. We have also the number seven, which is the symbolism in number of perfection. This symbol occurs fifty-three times. There are seven churches, seven Spirits, seven golden lampstands, seven stars, seven seals, seven horns, seven eyes, seven angels, seven trumpets, seven thunders, seven thousand, seven heads, seven mountains, and seven kings. There is also the number ten, which speaks of completeness. The beast out of the sea, representing world power, has ten horns and ten crowns. Further, there is also the number twelve, which speaks of final perfection. We read of twelve thousand, twelve stars, twelve gates, twelve angels, twelve tribes, twelve foundations, twelve apostles, twelve pearls, and twelve manner of fruits.

The symbolism of colour is prominent also in the Book of the Revelation; white, denoting purity, righteousness, joy, and victory; red, speaking of bloodshed and war; and purple, indicating imperial luxury and pomp; emerald, speaking of winning and patient race; and black, predicting calamity, bereavement, and distress.

Further, there is the symbolism of animate forms, such as the lamb, mentioned twenty-six times, speaking to the world of Jesus Christ; the eagle, reminding us of God as revealed in the Old Testament; horses, symbolic of conquest; wild beasts, speaking of world powers, false ecclesias-

tical systems; frogs, illustrative of all manner of uncleanness; and locusts, picturing future and terrible destruction.

Furthermore, there is in the Book a symbolism of the natural elements and forces, such as the air, speaking of the spiritual realm; the earth, mentioned eighty times; an earthquake, speaking of revolution and anarchy; the sea, illustrative of the restless unorganized populace, or social order; the clouds, speaking of majesty and glory; and the thundering, lightnings and hail, telling of judgment, and of the Divine anger. Let us remember that these symbols are illustrations or photographs of tremendous realities, events, or occurrences lying back in history, out in the social order, and far and near in the future in the onward marching of the human race.

Let us not miss the original, by looking only at the picture. This is what a great many students of the Revelation have done, with the result that they literalize the visions, and miss, to their own confusion, what the picture symbolized. Some years ago, I was asked to assist a Russian ministerial student in reading the Book of the Revelation through. He used his own translation of the Book, and I used the King James Version. I would read the verse first, and he would follow, looking at his own text. When we read that word "signified," he raised the question "What does that word mean?" I asked him what it meant in

his own translation. He looked at it for a moment, and then said, "It means photographed, pictured," and then added in surprise, "Well, well, this is a picture show we have here." This is precisely what we have in the Book of the Revelation, and it is the greatest "picture show" that was ever presented to this world.

VI. THE IMPORTANCE

Another thing emphasized in this Divine Preface is the Importance of the Contents and Teaching of the Book of the Revelation. The Author says, "Blessed is he that readeth and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein." This is one of seven benedictions contained in this Book (1: 3; 14: 13; 16: 15; 19: 9; 20: 6; 20: 22; 22: 7, 14). The word "blessed" signifies happiness, enjoyment, contentment, satisfaction. In the reading, hearing, and keeping of what is recorded in this Book, then there is happiness, enjoyment, and satisfaction. I heard a theological professor urge upon an audience once the necessity and privilege of reading the Book of the Revelation. He told the audience that he had a ministerial friend who read this Book through several times a year. One day this friend of his was called upon by a friend of them both, and, finding the brother reading the Bible, asked, "What are you reading?" "The Book of the Revelation," was the reply. "What are you

reading that Book for?" was the second question. "Are you going to write a book on it?" "No." "Are you going to preach a series of sermons from it?" "No." "Do you understand it?" "No." "Then what in the world are you reading it for?" "There is a blessing promised to the one who reads this Book. I need that blessing, and that is the reason I am reading it."

It is true that there is a blessing promised to the person who reads the Book of the Revelation, and oh! how many of the Lord's people are depriving themselves of that blessing. The blessing is promised to three classes, to those who "read," to those who "hear," and to those who "keep" the things predicted therein. The Revelation then is to be read privately, publicly, in part, or in course. It is to be heard or understood by those who read it. To "hear" is to understand. The Book is not a concealing, but rather a revealing of God's thoughts, plans, and purposes for the race, from the beginning up to, and on into the eternity of the future. Hence, it is to be read and studied by the people of God. This Book, as no other, shows us the path across the field, and gives us the map for the future with the reward at the end. A blessing is also promised to those who "keep" the things read and understood in this Book. How can we keep them if we do not understand them? If the Book is to be read, understood, and to be kept, then it is to be studied. I insist that it must

be studied by the people of God. As Christ said to the writer of it, so He says to all ministers and teachers, and to all His people in all times and in all places, "SEAL NOT THE SAYINGS OF THE PROPHECY OF THIS BOOK" (22: 10). It is an open Book, and meant to be kept in the view of the Church always. Woe, then, to the person who neglects this Book, or who undertakes to seal it contrary to the command of Christ, or to draw God's people away from it, or to warn them against looking into it! He takes from the Church, which has now been for two thousand years, among the roaring, dashing waves, the chart by which Christ meant she should be guided, and wherein she may best see whither she is bearing, what are her perils, and where her course of safety lies! The men who undertake such a course regarding the Revelation, attempt to seal up what Christ has said should not be sealed. He not only "Takes away from the Words of this prophecy," but seeks to take away the Book itself. Let all of God's people reverently, believingly, and prayerfully "read," "hear," and "keep" the things unveiled here by our Risen Lord, in the Holy Spirit, through John the Apostle, and the blessedness promised will be theirs. This Divine call to "read," "hear," and "keep," what is written in the Book of Revelation is urged by the fact "that the time is at hand" for the fulfillment of the predictions recorded.

PART II
THE GLORIOUS GREETING

II

THE GLORIOUS GREETING

(*Revelation 1:4-8.*)

THIS passage above contains the Greeting which sounds the keynote of the whole Book of the Revelation, by proclaiming to the Church of all time in the future, the eternal power of God, the Universal and Penetrating Energy of the Holy Spirit, and the Redeeming Lordship of Christ, who may return to earth, at any moment, to overcome His enemies. John, by the Holy Spirit, is the Writer of this sublime greeting. We know of no John except the Apostle, who had the authority, as the messenger of Jesus, to address seven churches. The churches addressed were located in Asia, that is, a Roman province by that name, which was the western part of what is now called Asia Minor. It included Mysia, Lydia, Caria, part of Phrygia, and the islands off the coast. These churches are all named in the eleventh verse, as Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, Laodicea, and are seven in number, which number signifies completeness. The seven churches stand for the complete Church of Christ throughout this age. Surely

no one will dream that the seven churches in Asia, now long passed away, were the only ones addressed in this prophecy. The seven churches are plainly representative assemblies, amid which the Son of Man walks, to see how that fire which He has kindled is giving light. We must surely understand that it is not exclusively in Asia that He is walking, or amid seven assemblies there, but in the midst of all the churches of all lands and all places. The seven assemblies of believers, mentioned here by name, have long passed away, and exist no more. But has the instruction passed away, that was given to the churches at that time? The instruction given to the churches at that time has grown in vividness and power throughout history, such as those to whom it was first addressed could hardly realize. The Holy Spirit is addressing the message of the Revelation to the whole Church to-day with a fuller application than ever. In the seven churches in Asia, there were conditions *symbolically* represented which are found in the Church of Christ generally to-day. These conditions have obtained, in the Church, from her inception to the present, and will continue to a greater or less degree, to the end. In fact, the conditions that obtained in those seven churches may all be found in any local assembly of God's people at the present time. Let us look in particular to this greeting of John, for it is as much addressed to us to-day as it was to the churches in Asia, 1,900

years ago. There are manifestly four things in this greeting: First, A Benediction of Grace; Second, A Doxology of Praise; Third, A Promise of Hope; and Fourth, A Claim of Absolute Deity.

I. THE BENEDICTION OF GRACE

We will notice in the first place, The Benediction of Grace. "Grace be unto you, and peace, from him which is, and which was, and which is to come; and from the seven Spirits which are before his throne; and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth." In this Benediction, we have the announcement of grace and peace from the whole Glorious Godhead. Grace and peace from God the Father, through Jesus Christ the Son of the Father, by the ministry of the Holy Spirit, is what all need to experience, and to realize deeply in the depths of the soul, before we can enter upon the study and enjoyment of the communications of such a character as we have here. We all need that grace, that unconditioned, eternal, Divine grace, wherein all believers stand; that grace that gives to the sinner a righteous position before God, and cannot ever fail; and peace, that rest of soul which results from a right relation with God, and which enables us to contemplate sorrow and all the evils before us, the waves of which, the higher they are, will only the more cast us upon the Rock of Refuge. Christ made peace by His blood;

declared peace in His Resurrection and now maintains peace in His Session at the Right Hand of God.

1. The grace and peace mentioned here are first from God the Father, who is described as "Him which is, and which was, and which is to come." This title of God is but the translation of "Jehovah," as we see at a glance. Thus God is here described as the eternal, unchangeable, ever-existent, always the same, and all powerful One. Jehovah is the Covenant God, and at the same time the God in Government. It is not of our relationship to Him that we are here reminded, but of His necessary relationship to all time, and all events and circumstances in time. The One who was before all, is the One who dominates all, who abides through all, and the One upon whom all things depend. God is first "Who is." That He *is*, is the first fact about God for all of us. "He that cometh to God must believe first that God *is*" (Heb. 11: 6). But then God "Who is," "*was*." There has been no beginning for Him, He is the Eternal One. The One "who is," and "was" is He also "Who is to *come*." The earth, the social order, and human governments may change, but there will be no change with Him, and no successor to Him. Grace and peace from such an One, how much it means to all believers as they are perfectly revealed in the Man Christ Jesus! This unconditional grace of God and this peace

growing out of that grace, is as eternal, independent, and abiding, as their Source and Author.

2. Then this Benediction of Grace is "From the seven Spirits of God which are before his throne." The Holy Spirit is mentioned eighteen different times in the Revelation (1: 10; 2: 7, 17, 29; 3: 1, 6, 13, 22; 4: 2, 5; 5: 6; 11: 11; 14: 13; 17: 3; 21: 10; 22: 17). The Holy Spirit is here called "The *seven* Spirits of God." In this title, we see at once the style of the Revelation. The seven Spirits are but the perfect sevenfold energy and work of the One Holy Spirit, the third person of the Godhead, acting in accordance with the mind and plan of Him who is upon the throne, and in the energy and authority of that throne itself. Revelation is the Book of the Throne, and that is what gives character and colour to all that we have here. The throne always stands for sovereignty, government, and authority. Christ, the Risen and Glorified One, is the only One who has the seven Spirits of God to give (3: 1).

The seven Spirits of God are pictured as "Seven lamps of fire before the throne" (4: 9). As seven lamps before the throne, the Holy Spirit reveals God, the One who occupies the throne, together with His plans and purposes for this earth and the race. These "seven Spirits" carry us back (Isa. 11: 2, 3) to where we find them in connection with the King of Israel, the Rod out of the Stem of Jesse. Here we have the arrangement of the

lamps in connection with the lamps of the sanctuary, which, as we know, were in three pairs with a central stem. The central and uniting stem testify to the fact that the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Jehovah, the Covenant God. The different branches give us the nature revealed, the pairs, the character as witness, three pairs bringing in the Divine fullness and manifestation; the whole seven giving a complete unfolding of God in His plans and ways. In Isaiah, the seven Spirits are connected with Christ as Man; in Revelation the seven Spirits are connected with the throne of God, the throne, as before noted, standing for sovereignty, government, authority, wisdom, power, truth, love, and holiness, and all of these unveiled in the fullness of blessing for us. To believe and realize this is a necessary and wonderful beginning for the study of this Book. Not only is grace and peace from the Eternal God, but also from "the seven Spirits," the one absolutely holy and perfect Spirit, who reveals God in His nature, purposes, plans, and ways. He knows the deep things of God, and these deep things of God He communicates to those who are spiritually minded.

3. But this Benediction of Grace is "From Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth." God the Father is the Author of grace and peace; the Holy Spirit is the Minister of grace and peace; Christ Jesus, the Son, is

the medium of grace and peace. It is important to notice the different titles given here to Christ. He is "The Faithful witness." He also is called "The faithful and *true* witness" (3: 14). He entered the world in order that He might bear witness to the truth (John 18: 37). All the people of God are in witness character, but after all, how feeble and limited their testimony throughout the ages! If we take the Church at large, how unfaithful she has often been as a witness for Christ. But here is the One Faithful Witness, the One who abides true to the compact, whatever may be the failure of His people. "If we be faithless, he abideth faithful." Christ is a witness to the Father, who occupies the throne, and a witness to Himself, the Redeemer of men, whatever His people may be. He is also a witness to our condition naturally, to the sin from which He came to deliver us, in that He went down to death, which death is the fruit of our sins. Because He is the faithful witness, the righteousness of the throne is fully maintained by Him, and the authority and power of the throne are safe in His hands.

He is also described as "The first begotten of the dead." He is elsewhere said to be "The first-born from the dead" (Col. 1: 18), "that in all things he might have preëminence." Christ is the firstborn of the dead to enter immortal resurrection life. This was predicted of Him (Psa. 89: 27). When Christ went down to death, the glory of God

was entrusted to Him as man; when He came up from death again, He manifested that glory as that power which routed death and brought to light life and immortality.

He is here also described as the "Prince" or ruler "of the kings of the earth." The earth is mentioned eighty times in Revelation, and stands for the people on it whom Christ purchased by His own blood. The kings of the earth speak of human governments which, at that time, had rejected Him. Human governments are still, in the mass, rejecting Him. They will not consent to Him reigning over them. In a real sense, there is not a Christian human government on the face of the globe, and there never has been such. Nevertheless, Christ is the one ruler of this earth, owned of God, now ruling on the Father's throne. Christ has had more to do with human governments throughout this age, than even those governments themselves ever dreamed of. One day He will ask to have His throne given to Him, and all of His enemies subjected to Him, and made the footstool of His feet. And then, and only then, will this world have a Christian government. Thus we see that the grace and peace here announced and offered is from the eternal, glorious Godhead, the Father, the Holy Spirit, and Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father.

II. THE DOXOLOGY OF PRAISE

This is so much for the Benediction of Grace.

Now let us look at the triumphant Doxology of Praise, "Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins with his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God, his Father; to him be Glory and Dominion forever and ever. Amen." In these words, we have the voice of the Church. The doxology the Church sings here is, doubtless, addressed to Christ. There are other doxologies in the New Testament which are addressed to Him (Rom. 16: 27; 2 Tim. 4: 18; Heb. 18: 21; 1 Pet. 4: 11). Three things are spoken of Christ in this Doxology of Praise.

1. He is presented in this song as "*Him that loveth us.*" It should not be "loved us," as in the Authorized Version, but "*loveth us*" as in the Revised text, and this for the reason that His love for us never had a beginning, knows no change, and will continue forevermore. The love that Christ has for His own is eternal, immutable, supreme, and sacrificing. In fact, the love that Christ has for those that have been given to Him by the Father, is of the same character as that love that the Father has for Christ (John 17: 26; see also John 13: 1; Rom. 8: 35-39). The enemies of the Lord's people were strong and bitter at this time, and the Church was passing through tribulation, but through it all Christ was "*He that loveth,*" notwithstanding all. Having begun to love His own in redeeming grace He will love them unto the uttermost of eternity. There is absolutely nothing

that can deprive the Lord's people of the love that flows to them through Jesus Christ the Son (Rom. 8: 35-39).

2. Further, Christ in this Doxology is set forth as the One who "washed (or loosed) us from our sins by his own blood." The love of Christ is present, without commencement, and abiding, but the "washing" or loosing is something that took place in the indefinite past. The loosing is an accomplished fact. Christ by reason of that eternal love of His has become historically, and potentially, the Redeemer of slaves. This world is a vast slave market in which human beings are sold under sin. But the redemption from sin is an accomplished fact through the death of Christ. Christ's love in all its fullness and blessedness is a present love; so our redemption from sin is a past redemption. We have not to wait and to work to be pardoned. The work has long since been accomplished, and that completely and finally. The eternal decree went forth, the releasing word was spoken, the forgiveness declared, and the pardon purchased and sealed when Christ went down into death, and left His tomb again in resurrection life and power. All that man has to do now is to believe it, and to appropriate it to himself as a glorious accomplished fact for him.

3. Not only does Christ love us now, and not only has He by one act of His Grace, through His blood, loosed us from the guilt, penalty, power, and

pollution of our sins, but He "hath also *made* us kings and priests unto God and his Father." The glory of the saved brightens as the Doxology of Praise proceeds. That we should have a place in the eternal abiding Grace of God is much. That we should have freedom from our sins through His precious blood is vastly more, and almost too much for faith. But to love is added honour, and to freedom from sins is added official position and dignity. Christians are not only loved by God, and pardoned of all their sins, but they are made priests, named and anointed for immortal regencies. One has said "There is no believer however obscure and humble, who may not rejoice in princely blood, and who is not on the way to possess eternal priesthood and dominion." The kingdom here described is a kingdom whose subjects are priests, worshippers brought near to God with the spirit of praise and thanksgiving. Every child of God, man, woman, boy or girl, is a priest by reason of their union with Christ, God's one and only High Priest, Jesus our Lord. As Peter says, the people of God are "A holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable through Jesus Christ," and "A royal priesthood" also, "to show forth the virtues of him who called us out of darkness into his marvellous light." Well might the song of praise be "to *him* be glory and dominion forever and ever," or for the ages and ages, for He is "the Father of Eternity" as Isaiah declares. He is the One who

brings everything, after sin has wrought its worst dishonour, and done all it could for the ruin of mankind, into complete subjection to God. The "dominion" or government of the race in this world belongs to Christ, and one day He will have and exercise it. Here grace has reigned unto peace, and nothing, absolutely nothing in the future, as to a degree in the present, will fail of the blessing. Conflict is before us now, as it was before the Church at that time. The very Prince of Peace has brought the sword instead of peace, and all along the way there is the need of overcoming; but the end is certain, and the song of triumph is raised at the very beginning—the song of *His* triumph, who has prevailed and conquered upon our behalf, and as a consequence, a song which never can be silenced by the noise of combatants, by the strife which cannot disturb the peace of those to whom He giveth peace.

III. THE PROMISE OF HOPE

This leads us to a consideration of the Promise of Hope. "Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him. Even so, Amen." The Lord's coming is frequently spoken of throughout the Book (1: 7, 8; 2: 16, 25; 3: 11; 16: 12–16; 22: 7, 12, 20). In the messages to the churches, the event of

Our Lord's Second Coming is mentioned four different times. In the heart of the Book, right in the very place where demons at work are fully described, there breaks in a voice, as of one standing in the background, saying, "Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth and keepeth his garments lest he walk naked, and they see his shame." Though there are announcements, promises, warnings, and premonitions of the Lord's Coming frequently made in the earlier part of the Book, yet the event itself is not "*signified*" until the nineteenth chapter. In that chapter there are shouts of exultation: He has come at last! The enemies of Christ and His Church are forever put aside, and Christ is reigning on earth with His own. In the concluding personal conversation with John the Messenger, Jesus speaks out boldly again saying, "Behold, I come quickly." John then breathes out the prayer of his own full heart—a prayer that ought to be the petition of the whole Church to-day, "Amen: Come, Lord Jesus." So the very last word of the whole Bible is one in which the request is made for the return of our Lord. The Book of Revelation is athrob with this teaching and hope.

1. This promise declares, "*Behold*, he cometh." That is, look out, be on the alert for the Lord is coming. Yes, "He cometh!" There are those even among Christians who do not like this teaching but "He cometh." There are those who hate

the very thought of the Lord's Second Advent, and will not have a word concerning it, but "He cometh." They may laugh at it as they wish, may deny it, may ridicule it, but the word is "He cometh." When Jesus went to heaven from Olivet, it was not His intention to remain there. He said it was wise and proper for Him to go away, for if He went not away the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, His second self, would not come to them (John 16: 7). When Christ went to heaven, it was for the Church's benefit; it will be for the Church's benefit that He will return again. Few believe this and still fewer take it to heart.

How will the Lord come a second time? He will come, not in spirit only, not in providence only, not in the removal of men by death only, but in His own proper person as "The Son of Man." For the Apostle said (1 Thess. 4: 16), "For the Lord HIMSELF shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first." What will be the manner of that coming? It will be exactly according to the manner of His going away. John was present when the Lord left the earth and heard the angels say, "Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus which is taken from you up into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven" (Acts 1: 11). Jesus left this earth bodily, visibly, unexpectedly, triumphantly,

and gloriously, and He will return, according to this promise, in the same manner.

When will the Lord come again? None but God knows this. "Watch therefore," said the Saviour, "for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come" (Matt. 24: 42). Again He said, "But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father." Christ's ignorance of the exact date of His Second Coming was a part of His self-humiliation on behalf of the race. He was ignorant because He willed to be ignorant. Man cannot will to be ignorant, for the more he tries to forget a thing, the more he will remember it. But Christ willed not to know it. This is a proof of His Deity rather than an evidence of His proper humanity. It may be that the date of the Second Advent is not fixed in the eternal councils of God, for that date may be dependent upon the faithfulness of the Church. However that may be, there is no doubt but what the date, the year, the day, and the hour of the Lord's Second Coming is not made known to men. More than once, our Lord sounded the note to His disciples of possible delay, and forewarned them regarding it (Matt. 25: 19). There are two elements which stand out very strongly in view of that glorious event, the element of certainty as to the fact itself, and the element of uncertainty as to the time when that event will take place. The one thing that the New Testament

emphasizes in relation to the Second Coming of Christ, and magnifies, is that of an expectant Church, and holds forth that sublime event as her "Blessed Hope."

2. This passage says that "He cometh with *clouds*." Frequently there are references to clouds in the Revelation (10: 1; 11: 12; 14: 14, 15, 16). Our Lord promised that He would come again in the clouds of heaven (Matt. 24: 30; 26: 64). When clouds are used as symbols, they speak of majesty, glory, pomp, splendour, and judgment. Christ makes the clouds His chariot, and walks upon the wings of the wind. When the Lord comes again, it will not only be unto salvation apart from sin for those who are saved, but it will be also in judgment upon those who reject Him. There are different kinds of clouds, as we all know, clouds of vapour, clouds of smoke, and clouds of dust. There was the Shekinah cloud, symbolic of the Divine Presence, which guided Israel through the desert. There was also that white cloud which appeared above, and around the Saviour when He was transfigured in the mount. There is also a cloud of witnesses (Heb. 12: 1), made up of those dead and redeemed souls who while here were triumphant in the faith and who have passed on before. When the Lord comes a second time, those who are saved, and have been with Him, having passed through death, will return with Him in glory (1 Thess. 4: 14). These may be the clouds

referred to in this passage. At any rate, "He cometh with *clouds*."

3. Not only will the Lord come in His own proper person with majesty and judgment, but when that event arrives, "Every eye shall see him." The event will be public, universal, and visible. He was visible in the first coming; He will be just as visible and real in His Second Coming. It does not say that all shall see Him at the same time, or in the same scene, or with the same feeling. But somewhere, at some time, with feelings of some kind, all will see Him. That person was never born, and never will be born, who will not see Christ in His Second Coming. To every one that has lived, and to every one who shall live, He will show Himself, and compel every one to meet His eye. The blind shall have their eyes opened, and they shall see Him. The dead will be brought back from death, and they shall see Him. All the living shall see Him. The good, and the bad, the wise and the ignorant, the old and the young, shall see Him, sometime, somewhere, in the panorama of that great event. Some shall see and shall shout, "Lo, this is our God, we have waited for him"; and others shall see Him and cry "Hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb." The coming of Christ will be then absolutely universal. The first coming was confined to one little country, and practically to one people. The Second Advent will

be for all countries, and for all peoples on the face of the globe. Even they which pierced Him shall see Him in that day, and that event will have terrible distinction for them. That wretched man who betrayed Him, the soldier who pierced His side, and all who have made common cause with them in wrong doing, persecuting, wounding, and insulting the Lamb of God shall be compelled to face His judgment, and to look upon Him whom they have pierced. What a terrible day that will be for unbelievers, mockers, rejectors, and rebels against the Christ!

4. Further, this Promise of Hope says that when Christ comes again, "All tribes of the earth shall mourn over him." Some think that this is a special reference to the Jews. This may be true. At least there can be no doubt but the Jews are included in this prophetic announcement. The phrase "All tribes of the earth," is contrasted with "saints," the people of Christ. This wail of penitence and sorrow looks as if it were a fulfillment of that prophecy (Zech. 12: 10) where it is foreannounced that the house of David shall mourn for Him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his first born. To some at least, and doubtless to a large number, comparatively speaking, the event of the Lord's coming will be a great sorrow and a great bitterness. What would be the sorrow, the sadness, the distress, the heart pain, should the

Lord come at this moment! I am not surprised that the Christ-rejecting world and worldly Christians have no love for the Lord's Second Coming. Were it otherwise, I would be surprised, and greatly distressed. The announcement of the Lord's coming sounds the death-knell of their gaieties and worldly pleasures. In fact, it converts their songs into shrieks of horror and despair. When this event transpires, the true people of God will be raptured into the skies, there to meet their Saviour, their Redeemer, the Bridegroom. When the rapture takes place, from the same field, the same home, the same bed, the same shop, the same office, "one shall be taken and the other left." And on those remaining ones who did not themselves get ready for that event, will the judgment fall, and not a family, tribe, nation, nor individual of all that are left, shall escape. "Even so, Amen."

IV. THE CLAIM OF ABSOLUTE DEITY

We will complete our study at this time by looking at the Divine Claim by which this greeting is completed. "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, sayeth the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty." Christ, as God's angel, is undoubtedly the speaker here. Four times is this Claim of Absolute Deity made (1: 8, 11; 21: 6; 22: 13). There are four titles in this Divine Claim, and we would do well to note them carefully. The titles used here are ap-

plied both to God and to Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

1. There is the claim, "I am Alpha and Omega." These are the names of the letters that begin and end the Greek alphabet. It is the same as if we would say in English, "I am the A and Z." When Christ says, "I am the Alpha and the Omega," He claims to be what letters and language are meant to be, namely, the expression or utterance of thought. Not only is Christ the A and Z of the alphabet, but He is the complete expression, or public declaration of the will and mind of God. Christ is the Word, and as such, He is the embodiment of the totality of the Divine perfections. God is Spirit, invisible, immaterial, intangible and unapproachable. But that invisible, immaterial, intangible Spirit, God, may be expressed or declared, or may set Himself forth in comprehensible language.

That language of the invisible God is Jesus Christ, the Son of God. He is the final and complete revelation of Jehovah to mankind. What language is to man, the expression of thought, plan, purpose, love, holiness, truth, will, Christ is in His relation to God the Father. He said, "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father" (John 14: 9). Paul said that Christ "is the image of God" (Col. 1: 15), and the one who wrote the Hebrews (1: 3) declared Him to be "The brightness of his glory, and the express image of his

person." Christ then is that One through whom God has revealed Himself to the race, hence He could claim, "I am Alpha and Omega."

2. Not only is Christ the Alpha and the Omega; He is also "The beginning and the ending." I am aware that these words, in this particular passage are not found in some of the oldest and best copies of this Book. In the Revised Version, they are omitted altogether. Some think these words found their way into the text merely as an explanation of the clause going before it. These words appear to be a translation of the previous claim, for they do not convey to many any additional thought. But if these words be not genuine in this verse, they are genuine in chapter twenty-two and verse thirteen. There Christ is represented as claiming, and announcing, "I am . . . the beginning and the end." In the fourth verse of this chapter they are used as a description of God as the self-existent, independent, eternal, and unchangeable One. But so one are the Son and the Father, that the designation that is applicable to God is used also of Christ. If God be the beginning, and the ending, Christ is also the beginning and the ending. Christ is the beginning because all things have their origin in Him. "For by him were all things created" (Col. 1: 16, 17). He is the ending because in Him, and for Him, all things have their consummation. He is the first in creation because He is before all things, and by Him

all things are held together; and He is the consummation of creation because all things tend toward Him. He is the beginning of history, and the consummation of all history for the ages in time were adapted to Him (Heb. 1: 2). He is the beginning of redemption for He wrought out the plan for the saving of the race; and He is the ending of redemption for the reason that redemption in the fullness of its manifestation will be for His glory. Even if these words be not genuine in this passage, it is true, according to references elsewhere in this Book and throughout the Bible that Jesus Christ is the "Beginning and the Ending, the First and the Last."

3. In this claim, Christ is set forth as the One "Who is, and who was, and who is to come." As we have learned, this is a definition of the title "Jehovah" which belongs, apart from Christ, alone to God. Christ *is*. That is the first fact for faith. In Him all things are held together. He fills all things, is above all things. Christ *was*. That is the second fact for our faith. He never had a beginning for He was before all things (Col. 1: 17). He was with the Father before the world came into existence. Christ *is to come*. That is the third fact for faith. He will have no successor. He is the eternal I AM who remains the same through all the changes and fluctuations of time. As the Father exists in all the past, present, and future, eternal and immutable, so Christ,

“the express image of the Father,” is the same yesterday, to-day and forever. At the present time, and for nineteen hundred years Christ is at the right hand of the Majesty on High, and from that position, as the exalted Godman, He exercises the omnipotence and intelligence of Deity. We praise God for Christ “Who is, who was, and who is to come!”

4. There is a higher title given to Christ here, for He also says, “I am . . . the *Almighty*.” This is the highest name of all, and is used eight different times in the Revelation (1: 8; 4: 8; 11: 17; 13: 3; 16: 7, 14; 19: 15; 21: 22). This title is only found in one other place in the New Testament (2 Cor. 6: 18), and is there a quotation from Isaiah. In the Hebrew, the name is Shaddai, and Jehovah Sabaoth, and sets forth One who is in command of all the hosts of heaven and of earth. Christ has all authority both in heaven and on earth, and with that authority He possesses the ability to exercise it, and hence He is qualified to meet, and to conquer all His foes. The foes of the Church are the foes of Christ. The Church was meeting and suffering from her foes at that time as she has been since. Christ here introduces Himself to the Church as the One who has unlimited power, unlimited authority to exercise that power, and unlimited intelligence to direct that power and authority. He is able and willing to look after the enemies of the Church, and hence He says to the

Church, "I am . . . the Almighty." This claim of Christ announces the complete subjection of all created things finally to Christ. It leaves absolutely nothing that is not potentially put under Him. He is worthy then of the confidence of the Church. Let us give Him our confidence, our love, our service, our money, our time, our all, and let us bow lowly at His feet and accept His Truth and be happy in Him, for He is our only victory and joy.

Object of my first desire,
Jesus crucified for me;
All to happiness aspire,
Only to be found in Thee:
Thee to please, and Thee to know,
Constitute my bliss below;
Thee to see, and Thee to love,
Constitute my bliss above.

Lord, it is not life to live
If Thy Presence Thou deny;
Lord, if Thou Thy Presence give
'Tis no longer death to die:
Source and Giver of repose,
Only from Thy smile it flows;
Peace and happiness are Thine;
Mine they are, if Thou art mine.

Whilst I feel Thy love to me,
Every object teems with joy;
May I ever walk with Thee,
For 'tis bliss without alloy:
Let me but Thyself possess,
Total sum of happiness:
Perfect peace I then shall prove,
Heaven below and heaven above.

PART III
THE VISION VICTORIOUS

III

THE VISION VICTORIOUS

(Revelation 1: 9-20.)

WE now come to the study of the first vision of the book, the vision of Christ Himself in relation to the Church on earth throughout the interim spanned by the Advents. The Lord is seen in this vision in the midst of the churches with the golden snuffers in His hand. He is there giving attention to the lamps of His testimony. In presenting this vision, John makes an announcement concerning himself, saying, "I John, who also am your brother and companion in tribulation and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was in the Isle that is called Patmos, for the Word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ." In this announcement, he joins himself with those he is addressing. He is their representative, already in the kingdom, but in a kingdom, to be in which involves necessarily suffering. It is not the kingdom in mystery, that kingdom in which the cross, and all that it signifies, is the significant symbol. It is the kingdom of the Sufferer who is initiating His people into that suffering, through which He Himself secured the Crown of Glory. The tribulation here is the train-

ing for glory yonder. There are three things in this vision that we will note separately: First, the Circumstances of the Vision Given; Second, the Character of the Vision Given; Third, the Consequence of the Vision Given.

I. THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF THE VISION

First, Notice carefully the circumstances in which this Vision was given by our Lord, and received by John for the servants of Jehovah. Two things stand out prominently here: the place where John was, and his mood spiritually, when the Lord appeared to him. "I John . . . was in the Isle that is called Patmos, for the Word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ."

1. The island called Patmos is easily located as one of the Sporadeas in the Grecian Archipelago, settled early and with the remains of a primitive civilization. It is a barren, rocky island, with no reminders of the palms which gave it the name of Palmosa. There are several chapels and monkish asylums on the island at the present time. It is claimed that the name of the island comes from a root which signifies "To tread under foot" or "To suffer." Both of these meanings would be appropriate for one who was being trampled under the foot of Pagan Rome, and suffering for and with Christ. John was in that island, and it is claimed a very old man at the time that the vision was enjoyed by him. Professor Ramsay claims

and asserts that John was in that island for a period of about eighteen months. What was he there for? His own testimony is "For the Word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ." He is an outcast from the world for his loyalty to the Truth of God as it is in Christ. He is apart from the world, its strifes, and its glories, but he is not indifferent to all that is going on, not self-exiled, but one banished from the world as Christ was banished from it. But though banished from the world, hated and persecuted by it, he is persistently keeping the patience, or endurance of Jesus Christ. It was while John was there suffering for the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ that he was visited by the Risen Lord. Had it not been that he had been cast out because of his faithfulness to Truth, perhaps we never would have had the Book of the Revelation. What Patmos was to John, the storm was to the disciples. What Patmos was to John, Bedford Jail was to Bunyan. Had it not been for the Bedford jail in the life and experience of Bunyan, we would never have had the "Pilgrim's Progress." What lonely Patmos was to John, illness, business reverses, severe sorrow and trial may be to the people of God to-day.

One time it was my painful duty to carry the sad news to aged parents about the accidental poisoning of a young doctor, their beloved son. On the way thither, I planned how best to tell them the sad news. I decided to tell them as quickly, as

wisely, and as tenderly as possible. The father was then an aged man, and a farmer; at that time, the mother had been bedridden for eighteen years. On approaching the house, I saw the father working in the barnyard. I went over to him, introduced myself, and then said, "I have sad news for you to-day. Your son has accidentally poisoned himself, and is dead." He drove the fork with which he was working into the ground near his feet, fixed his jaw, and looked into space. I left him standing there. I feared for the mother, for I knew how weak, sick, and aged she was. I went into the house and was shown into her room. There I saw a wasted form lying in bed, but her face was glorious. I introduced myself to her, and said, "I have sad news for you to-day." She said, "Do not keep me in suspense about it, tell me quickly. I am prepared for the worst." Then I said, "Your son has accidentally poisoned himself, and is dead." For a moment there was silence and to break the silence and suspense, I said, "It is very dark, is it not?" I shall never forget her answer to my question. It was, "Yes, Mr. Ross, it is very dark and cloudy, but I recognize Jesus in the storm." For eighteen years she had been suffering in Patmos. She had seen lightnings flashing, the clouds rolling, and she had heard the great billows dashing, but in it all, she had come to know the Lord as others cannot know Him. That trouble in your life, oh Christian man or woman,

is your Patmos experience. Have you seen, and have you recognized the Lord?

2. Not only was John in the Island of Patmos, being compelled to suffer banishment there for his faithfulness to Christ, but while there, though suffering greatly, he became "*in Spirit.*" This was not merely what was right and proper to him and to every Christian; it was something special, and that for a special purpose. The Holy Spirit of God, the seven Spirits before the throne, laid hold on John here, in intellect, sensibility, will, and even body, so as to carry him whither He would. In this condition of soul, John was wholly loosened from the earth and stationed as a spectator amid the events and circumstances of the ages that lay before him. God usually prepares His people for uncommon manifestations of Himself by the quickening and sanctifying influences of the Holy Spirit. Those who would enjoy communion with God, must, as John did, abstract their hearts and minds from all worldly and carnal things. In this condition of spiritual communion, the boundaries of time and space are thrown down, and one moves in a free and larger world. While John was in this condition he escaped, as it were, from the narrow confines of the Patmos Island, and was made to share the life, the sufferings, and even the glory of the infant Church, then scattered along the coast lines of the Great Sea. He is their brother and companion, both in the tribulation and in the king-

dom of Jesus Christ. He is with them, both in darkness and in glory. He is also along with them in that patience of the saints which he had learned to suffer and experience, both in the present trial and in the deferred hope. As a result of being under the dominion of the Holy Spirit and being in intimate fellowship with Him, John is made to hear, to see, and to write the revelation given.

To hear is to understand. There was a great voice like a trumpet, and John understood it as the voice of the Herald Angel who had called him to his work. To see is to receive and to lay hold of, with the faculties of the soul. To vision there must be something to see, something to see with, and something to see by. By his being "in Spirit," John had these three qualifications to a wonderful degree. Before him were the seven lampstands, and the Glorified Christ moving about in their midst. Within himself, there was spiritual sight which had been superhumanly bestowed and realized. Between the seven golden lampstands, and Christ in the midst, and John's spiritual sight, there was given spiritual illumination, and hence John saw the vision clearly. It is possible that there is an object to see, and an eye to see the object and yet something may intervene between the object and eye, and so hinder the vision. This was not so with John in the Island of Patmos, and should not be so with Christian men and women at any time. God the Spirit would not have it so.

I will tell you what I mean. It was my privilege one time to be invited to a dinner in the home of a very dear friend in the city of Toronto, Canada. We were invited there with a number of others to meet, and to hear a prominent lady called "The Sunday Lady from Possum Trot." She had a wonderful story to tell regarding her Christian educational work with the boys and girls among the mountains of the south. In fact, her story was fascinating and thrilling throughout. The great majority of those who were present and listened to that story were moved as perhaps they had never been moved before. Beside me, to my right, there sat two ladies. When the Sunday Lady had finished her story, and had taken her seat, I heard the second woman to my right ask the first lady, "Were you at Grand Opera this week?" That second woman had missed seeing the vision because all the time the lady was speaking, she was thinking of Grand Opera. The object may be just there, the sight may be in good exercise, and yet something may intervene to obstruct the view, and so miss the vision. God by His Spirit provided the sight, the object to see, and the light by which we may look upon that object, and will give us the grace and the ability, if we will, to remove everything that is in our way to seeing.

II. THE CHARACTER OF THE VISION

This is so much for the Circumstances of the

vision, and now let us look at the Character of the Vision given. John said, "I heard behind me a great voice as of a trumpet, saying, I am Alpha and Omega, the First and the Last; and what thou seest, write in a book, and send it to the seven churches which are in Asia." He turned to see who was speaking, and being turned he saw, in the first place, seven golden candlesticks. There can be no question as to the meaning of the symbolism of these golden lampstands. Our Lord settles that for us in the twentieth verse, where He says, "*The seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven churches.*" This picture is taken from the Old Testament, where the candlestick stood in the Holy Place in the Tabernacle of Moses, which candlestick was made at God's command after a Divine pattern. The position occupied by the golden candlestick was significant as an illustration. It was not in the Holiest Place, but in the first tabernacle, called the sanctuary, or the Holy Place. The chief characteristic of that place was darkness. This would fitly represent the condition of the world where God has been pleased to place His Church. The darkness is a figure of speech signifying ignorance, fear, and immorality. The Church is placed in the world as a golden lampstand to give forth the light from the glorious presence of Jesus Christ. The golden lampstand, with its seven branches, was wrought after the fashion of an almond tree, the earliest tree of spring, to hasten into bloom; and,

as we learn from the beauty of the workmanship, from the symbolical numbers largely resorted to in its construction, and from the analogy of the furniture of the tabernacle, it represented Israel when that people, having offered themselves at the altar, and having been cleansed in the laver of the court, entered as a nation of priests into the special dwelling place of their Heavenly King. In the Old Dispensation, the golden lampstand symbolized the Hebrew nation; in this Dispensation the golden lampstands symbolize the Church of Jesus Christ on the page of history. But John, when he had turned, did not only look upon golden lampstands, but there among them he saw the Risen Christ with the golden snuffers in His hand. We must notice in particular, the different characteristics of the Saviour, as He appeared there. What He was in the midst of the churches two thousand years ago, He has been ever since, and will be to the end. There are several things about Him here.

1. Our attention is called to His Position. John sees Him in the midst, or center, of the lampstands. This is not the only time when the Bible speaks of Him being in the midst. When only twelve years of age, He was in the midst of the doctors as a student and teacher (Luke 2:26). He gave the promise that "where two or three would gather together in His name for prayer and worship, He would be in their *midst*" (Matt.

18: 20). In the crucifixion, Christ was placed in their midst (John 19: 18). He was placed between two thieves then, and made the dividing line between them. He has been between two thieves ever since, the one saved thief and the other unsaved thief, and He now makes the dividing line between them. Not only is Christ in the center, a student, and teacher, not only is He in the center making the division between the saved and the unsaved, but we also find Him in the midst of the throne as the Lamb having omnipotence and omniscience (Rev. 5: 6). God knows how to give Christ the center, or the chief place. In the picture before us, He is in the midst of the churches as their bond of union and as their source of light and power. This is what Christ wishes Himself to be for the Church on the page of history.

2. It will be noticed that we also have here the likeness of Christ. It says that He was "like unto the Son of Man." This is the title which He gave Himself. It is used eighty-five times in the Gospel narratives, and in eighty-three, it is employed by Christ Himself. He is described the same way in the Psalms and the visions of Daniel. It is a form of speech meant to set forth the essential importance and prominence of the human element of the Saviour's character. It is in His human nature that His redemptive work is conducted, and His victories won. It is as the Son of

Man that He came, lived, suffered, and died. It was as the Son of Man that He rose from the dead, and ascended into heaven. It will be as the Son of Man that He will come again, judge the Church and the world, and set up here His glorious, everlasting dominion. We are informed that it is because He is the Son of Man that all right of judgment is committed to His hands (John 5: 27).

You will notice that this statement says that He is "*one like* unto the Son of Man." This word sets us in search for something higher than humanity, though conditioned as humanity, and having everything in common with it. Christ was made "*like unto his brethren*," and made "*in the likeness of men*." We are also told that He was "*made flesh*." Christ is then "*One like unto the Son of Man*," that is Godhead embodied in humanity, not only for what has transpired in the past, or is going on at present, or is to be enacted at the judgment, but also for the whole eternity of administrations that relate to the saints and to the race. At the present time, Christ is the human Saviour, as well as the Divine Saviour. This is a message that the Church needs to-day as much as the seven local assemblies needed it when this message was first given.

3. Not only have we the position of Christ and His likeness here in this vision, but we have His dress as well. He was "*clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the paps with a*

golden girdle." We will find in the Revelation, the robe of the priest, the robe of the judge, and the robe of the king. The robe of the high priest was a long, flowing, white garment, with a girdle around about the loins. The robe of the king was a long, flowing white garment, with a golden girdle around about the breast. In fact, the official robe of the king was a combination robe of the priest and of the judge. The long trailing robes were always tokens of dignity and honour. In Isaiah's vision of the Lord on His throne, he speaks of just such a robe, the skirts of which filled the temple (Isa. 6). Righteousness is indicated by a white garment. Christ appears here to the churches, and to the Church throughout this age, as the Priest-King. He is in the midst of the Church not in character only, but in function as well. He is there as the priest because He has made atonement for sin, because He has presented the efficacy of the blood before the throne, and also because He is in the attitude of benediction for the Church's sake. Then He is there as the King, because it is His prerogative to hold sway over the Church's life, to lead her forth against her enemies, to fight her battles, and to gain her victories. All He was as the Priest-King in the midst of the Church then, He will be for the Church now and for every individual member thereof.

4. But again, we notice in this picture that we have the head and hair of Christ described. "His

head and his hair were white like wool, as white as snow." This symbolism is taken from the prophecy by Daniel where we have "the Ancient of Days, whose garment was *white* as snow and the hair of his head like pure wool." The Scriptures elsewhere tell us that the "hoary head is a crown of glory." Some take the white hair of Christ as symbolic of His Godhead. White hair stood for age. Is Christ not "the Ancient of Days"? The white hair was also the symbol of wisdom. In Christ we have all the treasures of Divine wisdom and knowledge. He appears here to the suffering churches, not only as the Eternal One but also as the omniscient One. He knows their troubles, their tribulations, their sufferings, not only intellectually but also experimentally. He will sympathetically succour all them that come unto God by Him.

I have often wondered if the white hair of Jesus did not tell us of His wonderful sympathy and compassion with and for His Church throughout this age. I know a young mother whose hair turned white in a few days after her son went into the war. I know several soldiers whose hair turned white after a few weeks in the war. Is Christ not appearing to His suffering people here to tell them of His sympathies with them in their trials? It is as certain as when the Apostle wrote the Hebrews that "We have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities but

was in all points tempted as we are, yet was without sin."

5. You will notice the eyes of the Saviour are also described in this picture. "And his eyes were as a flame of fire." Here is intelligence, burning, flashing, warming, all penetrating intelligence. Sometimes also the burning, flashing eyes speak of anger, of wrath, and of judgment. At any rate, here is power to read secrets, to bring hidden things to light, to search and to warm all hearts at a single glance. It was said of Cæsar that he had fiery eyes, a penetrating, warming glance. His was a look that his enemies could not stand. Christ is the mighty Cæsar of His Church, for "his eyes behold, his eyelids try the children of men." There is not a creature that is not manifest in His sight. "But all things are naked, and opened to the eyes of him with whom we have to do." Peter got a glance from the eye of the Saviour one time and he went out from the judgment hall and sobbed bitterly in the anguish of repentance. It is of great interest to read through the seven letters of Jesus as found in the second and third chapters of this book and mark how often He says to the churches "I know," "I know," "I know," and "I know." As He knew then, with that penetrating and exhaustive knowledge of His, so He knows now.

6. The feet of our Priest-King are also described; "and his feet like unto fine brass as if

they burned in a furnace." When the feet of a person are used as a symbol, they are always employed to illustrate procedure, behaviour, conduct, or general manner of life. This is what the Apostle means, referring to the preachers of the Gospel, when he says, "How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things" (Rom. 10: 15). Here we have illustrated the conduct or behaviour of Christ in the midst of the churches. In that behaviour, Christ is all glorious, even to His feet. His feet are like burning, or glowing brass, or like brass in the fire heated unto whiteness. When this metal is brought to such a state, it is generally insufferable to the human gaze. It presents an image of pureness which is terrible. It is upon these dreadful feet that our Lord walks among the churches, and it is with these feet that He will tread down all of His enemies, and crush everything that is anti-Christian. But to those who love Him, He will come to them upon these feet with messages and blessings of mercy.

7. Once more, the voice of the Saviour is here mentioned: "And his voice as the sound of many waters." A little while ago John heard the voice of Christ behind him, and at that time it was like the voice of a great trumpet calling him to his task. Now the voice of the Son of God in the midst of the churches is like the sound, or the roar, of many waters. Let us keep in mind that John

was on the Island of Patmos, and he was constantly hearing the roaring of the waves as they broke upon his rock-bound island home. What is the voice of many waters like? It has been defined as a "perfect concord of divers tones; many waters, one voice." "God, having of old time spoken unto the fathers in the prophets by divers portions, and in divers manners, hath at the end of these days spoken unto us in his Son." There are many streams of these waters, but they all converge in Jesus Christ. There is the voice of prophecy, and the voice of history. They both converge in Him. There is the voice of science, and the voice of art, and they also converge in Him. In the voice of Christ as many waters, there is strength, majesty, and power. It was with such a voice that the Saviour appeared unto the churches at that time, and has been appearing unto the churches ever since. "The voice of the Lord is powerful; the voice of the Lord is full of majesty." His voice always scatters the proud, and gives joy and confidence to the lowly and suffering.

8. Furthermore, the hand of the Saviour is mentioned and described: "And he had in his right hand, seven stars." We are not left in doubt about the meaning of the symbolism of the stars. That is settled for us by the Lord Himself in the statement "The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches." Stars are frequently used in this Book as symbols. There is one fallen and falling

star, and that star is the devil. There is one fixed, bright and morning star, and that star is Christ. There are many falling stars mentioned and described in this Book and they stand for apostate Christians; and there are also many fixed and shining stars, and they stand for the faithful and witnessing believers throughout this age. Here we have seven stars, and they stand for the angels of the seven churches, and the angels of the seven churches represent the churches themselves on the active side of their ministry. Christ has the seven stars in the grasp of His hand. When the hand is used as a symbol it is an illustration of the Divine purpose, and Divine power. The churches are within the grasp of the power of Him who is the Alpha from eternity to eternity, and the Omega from everlasting to everlasting. Christ holds these stars as things most precious. These churches are hated, disregarded, and persecuted by men, but they are precious to Him. He holds them as a man holds what He most esteems. He holds them for service now, for purging by and by, and for rewards when He comes the second time. He holds them for success against the hosts of evil, and for victory over all of His and their enemies. "I give unto them eternal life," said Christ, "and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand; . . . and no man shall pluck them out of my hand." To be in the hand of Christ is to be eternally secure.

9. And further still, the mouth of Jesus is mentioned and described here; "and out of his mouth went a sharp two-edged sword." This is another hint concerning the character of the Book. The mouth is the symbol of speech, or expression of thought. Many tell us that it is an index to the character of the person. The sword is a symbol of the authority of life and death. But this is not a hand sword, but a word sword. It accords exactly with what Christ has Himself said, "He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the words that I have spoken, the same shall judge him the last day." The Bible as a whole is spoken of as the sword of the Spirit (Eph. 6: 17). The Holy Spirit says "The Word of God is living, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and the intents of the heart." Christ appears in this vision in the midst of the churches with the word sword because the truth as proclaimed by Him through His servants carries on a judicial process. This sword has two edges, the one edge being prophecy, and the other edge being history. These two edges come to a common point which is Christ Himself, and penetrates, divides, and criticizes, even to the very deeps of the human soul and life. The Word of Christ is not an empty utterance, for when spoken by Him, and applied

by the Spirit of God, it works conviction, punishment, salvation, and regeneration. Were the Word of God faithfully, and purely preached and taught everywhere to-day, as it was at the time that the Revelation was given, there would be the same results from that Word to-day as there were then. Oh, the majesty and power of the word sword of Jesus! May He wield it in and among us more and more, for that sword is the savour of life unto life, or death unto death.

10. In this wonderful symbolic picture of the Redeemer in the midst of the churches, His countenance is also mentioned, "And his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength." The countenance is the sum total of all the features of the face. "The dome-like splendour of the forehead, crowned with white hair, the flashing glory of the wondrous eyes, the marvellous expressiveness of the mouth from which proceeds the sword-like speech, and the sound of many waters; take all these, and other things not described, in combination, and the result is a sun of light and glory, shining in strength." "God is a sun, and the merging of the features of humanity into the perfect expression of the countenance, reveals in might and majesty the Deity of the Son of Man." The churches are lamps; but Christ is the Sun. He is to the moral world what the sun is to the natural world. When in the Mount of Transfiguration "His face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was

white as the light." When He appeared to Saul of Tarsus it was in "a light above the brightness of the sun." The picture here presented of Christ begins with Him as the Son of Man, and ends with Him as the Son of God. He is the Godman now as truly as He was when He was here in the flesh in our very midst.

III. THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE VISION

We have seen the Circumstances and the Character of this wonderful vision of the glorified Christ in the midst of the churches, and now let us look at the Consequence, or effect of that vision on the one who experienced it. The consequences of such a vision are manifold, not only for John, but for every person represented by John.

1. In the first place, by reason of this vision, John was completely overwhelmed. "And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead." A vision of the glorified Christ always puts human nature in the dust. Young Isaiah saw the Lord, high and lifted up, and he said, as a result, "Woe is me for I am a man of unclean lips" (Isa. 6). Ezekiel saw the Lord in His glory and he said, "I fell upon my face, and heard a voice of one that spake" (Ez. 1: 28). Daniel saw the Lord and his strength was turned into weakness, and his comeliness into corruption (Dan. 10). Peter got a glimpse of the Lord in His glorious power, and as a result cried out, "Depart from me for I am a sinful man, O

Lord!" (Luke 5: 8). The three disciples looked upon the Lord in His transfiguration glory and they fell on their faces being terrorized by fear (Matt. 17: 6). The educated and cultured Saul of Tarsus saw the Lord in His resurrection power and glory, and fell prone upon the ground and heard a voice saying, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" (Acts 9: 6). John saw the Lord and fell at His feet, those feet that were like burnished brass, as one dead. This is a great beginning for Christian life and ministry. To be at the feet of Christ is to learn of Him as well as to be healed by Him. Moreover, to be at the feet of the Lord is to surrender all to Him. When a soul is crushed, emptied, and dead at the feet of Christ, it is then that soul begins to live. It is there that weakness becomes strength, and death becomes life. Oh, for the death of self at the feet of the Risen Lord!

2. Not only was John put upon his face as dead at the feet of Jesus when he saw this glorious vision, but he was inspired as well. While he was lying there as one dead at the feet of the Lord, Jesus stooped and laid His right hand upon him, that selfsame right hand that grasped and secured the seven stars of testimony. That grasp and touch of the right hand of Jesus must have thrilled John through and through. That was a saving, sanctifying, and glorifying touch. Daniel was touched by the selfsame hand, and he was first put upon his knees in the attitude of prayer, then

upon his feet in the attitude of service, and then was made to stand without trembling. Further, he was touched and his lips were opened, and he was made to speak forth the Divine message without fear or favour (Dan. 10). To have the right hand of the Lord laid upon us, is to have the power of the Lord spread over, and interpenetrating all of our weakness. Oh, for the right hand of the Lord's power upon us! That hand will be upon us the moment we take our true places as dead to self at the feet of our Risen Lord.

3. While John was there at the feet of the Lord, and while the right hand of the Lord lay upon and grasped him, several things were said to him by the Master. In the first place, He said to John, "Fear not." John evidently was afraid of something, and Jesus would not have him afraid, for fear always paralyzes effort, and stunts spiritual and moral growth. There are seven "Fear nots" of Christ in the New Testament. There is the "Fear not" of inspired hope (Luke 8: 15); the "Fear not" of perfect rest (Luke 12: 32); the "Fear not" in the midst of trouble (Acts 27: 24); the "Fear not" in success in soul winning (Luke 5: 10); the "Fear not" of glad tidings (Luke 2: 10); and the "Fear not" of this passage.

When the Lord says to one or more of His children not to fear, or cease their trouble or distress, He always gives them good reasons for so

doing. In this case, He made no less than a five-fold proclamation concerning Himself. First He said, "Fear not; I am the First and the Last." This title is found three times in the prophecy by Isaiah (41: 4; 44: 6; 48: 12), and is a proclamation of absolute Deity. It is used by our Lord at least three times in the Book of the Revelation. What is claimed in the Old Testament by Jehovah for Himself, is claimed in the Book of the Revelation by Christ for Himself. Christ is the First and the Last in eternity, the First and the Last in knowledge, the First and the Last in power, the First and the Last in love, the First and the Last in history, the First and the Last in redemption, and the First and the Last in the Church. This surely was a strengthening proclamation to John. He also went on and proclaimed, "I am he that liveth," or I am "THE LIVING ONE." In this proclamation He declares His fontal, underrived, independent and self-feeding life. Christ is the source of all life; life, vegetable, animal, intellectual, moral, spiritual, angelic, and even demoniacal. There is absolutely no life in the universe of which Christ is not the fountain and source. Further, Christ went on and declared to John, "I was dead." In the margin of the Revised Version the reading is, "I *became* dead." Christ passed through the event of death, and went into the state of death, where He remained for seventy-two hours. This wonderful proclamation

suggests two things, First, the Mystery in the Death of Jesus; and Second, the Voluntariness of the Death of Jesus. If Christ be the fountain of all life, then how did the fountain of all life *die*? It is evident that He had to assume that which could die, which was human nature. Even though He was the fountain of all life, He had power to lay down His life, and power to take it again. When He came to die on the cross, He voluntarily, by an act of His own will, yielded up the ghost to the Father. This was a most encouraging proclamation to John and to the Christians at that time, and so He said, "Fear not."

Not only did Christ proclaim to John at that time His absolute Deity, His absolute Life, and His absolute atoning Death, for He also declared unto him His present glorified humanity. "Behold, I am alive forevermore." This is the only one of the five proclamations that Christ introduced by the word "Behold." This word is employed to indicate that the thing specified is something wonderful. It was not something wonderful that Christ should be the First and the Last; it was not something wonderful that Christ should be the Living One; and neither was it wonderful that Christ should go to the cross and absolutely atone for the sins of the race, but it was something most wonderful for Christ, in human nature, to be alive forevermore. He had passed through the event of death, had been in the state of death, and had

come out of the condition of death, and was still THE SON OF MAN. It is as the Son of Man that Christ is alive forevermore. He is in the glory in bodily form, a real man. There He is clothed with immortality as man. Furthermore, He proclaimed to John His absolute Authority as the Son of Man for He said, "I have the keys of hell and of death." There are two regrettable things in this part of our passage, the one being the use of the word "hell," and the other the order of the two things specified, "hell and death." The Revised Version corrects both of these. Instead of the word "hell," we have the word "hades" which means the place or underworld of the dead. Instead of "*hades* and death" in the Authorized Version, we have "*death* and *hades*," and this is the proper order. Christ has the power over death, and no person can die without His consent. He can open the door of death and none can shut it, and He can shut it and none can open it. The termination of every life on this earth, when and how, is altogether within the authority of our Royal Redeemer. Christ died and rose again in order that He might be the Lord both of the dead and the living. So when Christ said, "Fear not," He gave good reasons for the quieting of the spirit, and the resting of the soul.

4. John was not allowed to remain on his face at the Lord's feet, and to be filled with fear very long. Doubtless, he was made to stand upon his

feet again by the right hand of the Lord's power. When standing upon his feet with his soul ravished with glory, he was a second time commissioned to his task, "Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter." What John saw and heard, he was not to keep to himself. Others were in need of the same message that he had received and enjoyed. What he saw and heard, he was to record, and send to the seven suffering churches in the province of Asia Minor. He was to write the things that he had seen. These were visions of historical events that had already taken place in the world's history. These past events are signified throughout the Book of the Revelation. Then he was to write the things that are. These were present events, going on at the time when the Revelation was given. These events have been present in the world and the Church's history throughout the entire age so far between the Advents of our Lord. These events too are signified and scattered throughout the Book. They are not difficult to distinguish. Then further he was to write the things that shall be hereafter, that is, future events and circumstances in the history of the world and the Church. When I say future, let it be remembered always, that it is future from the time that the Book of the Revelation was written. Two thousand years of what was future and prophetic, when the book was written, and the

Revelation given, has become history. We are in the midst of the future events, somewhere, but where we may not be able to definitely state. What John saw and heard of the past, present, and future events, in the history of the race, he was to write and send to the churches for their help and blessing. What we receive from the Lord, we are to make known to others. Some person else needs our testimony.

Before I understood the incident correctly, I found a tendency to criticize the Lord for asking that woman who had been healed of an unnameable disease, to tell the story of her deliverance in the presence of a mixed multitude. You will remember the incident. Our Lord had arrived in the city of Capernaum. Great crowds had gathered to meet and to greet Him. In the house of one Jairus, there was a little daughter who was at the point of death. A messenger was sent to request Christ to come to the home and to heal the daughter. The parents of the child were grief-stricken. Our Lord started for the home, and as He passed along the street, a woman who had an issue of blood for twelve years, and because of that, being under the ban of law, pressed through the crowd, saying, "If I but touch the hem of his garment, I shall be made whole." She touched the hem of His garment, and in response to her faith, virtue went forth from Christ and the woman was healed. When she was healed, she tried to slink away with-

out making known the blessing she had received. Just at that moment, Jairus arrived, saying to the messenger whom he had sent, "Trouble not the Master, my little daughter is now dead." Just at that moment the Saviour called that woman to the front and asked her to tell her story, which she did with trembling and great fear, and when she told her story, He turned to Jairus saying, "Fear not, only believe." As Jairus listened to the woman's story, his faith in the healing and power of the Master grew stronger and stronger. It is true the Saviour wished her to tell her story for her own sake, and for His sake, but above all, He wanted her to tell it for the sake of the sorrowful, and doubting Jairus. Jairus needed that woman's testimony just at that moment; the churches in Asia Minor needed John's testimony at just that moment. There are those about us that need our testimony, and let us not be tardy and weak in giving it to them.

PART IV
THE LETTERS FROM HEAVEN

I

THEIR AUTHOR

(*Revelation 2-3.*)

IN the second and third chapters of the Book of Revelation, there are seven letters dictated by our Lord, and written by the Apostle John, then sent to the churches in Asia Minor. These letters describe the visible Church of Christ, throughout this age, among the nations of the earth and on the field of history. Our Lord is represented as speaking to these churches commending them, warning them, counselling them, and encouraging them by promises. The messages sent to the churches are messages for the whole Church of Christ at any time in the history of this dispensation. The messages are addressed to groups as well as to individuals in the Church. These letters set before us certain conditions within the visible Church, conditions that may run successively or concurrently, conditions that may be found in the Church in general, or in any local assembly of the professed people of God. The idea in the first letter is that of Declension, the Christians in Ephesus having already left their first love. The idea in the second letter is that of Tribulation. The idea in the third letter is that of Patronage.

The idea in the fourth letter is that of Secularism or worldliness. The idea in the fifth letter is that of Separation, while the idea in the sixth is that of Evangelism. In the last letter the idea is Apostasy. These features of church life are visible almost everywhere among the people of God. There is declension, suffering, world patronage, secularism, separation unto Christ, evangelism, and apostasy from high ethical standards of living, teaching, and practice.

Throughout these letters, after having given the address to each local congregation, the Saviour calls attention to Himself and claims for Himself certain definite, symbolic titles, which are very significant. I wish now to direct your attention to the Author of the epistles. There are seven of these titles, and the most of them are complex.

I

The first one is in the epistle to the Ephesian Church. After having given the address, he said, "These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks." Here are several things, first, the seven stars. The stars are heavenly bodies. They shine and become visible when the sun is absent from the earth. They do their service at night. The stars referred to here, seven in number, you will find represent all the churches here named, for each of them has one star. The

question arises, what or whom do these stars prefigure? We are told in the previous chapter that "the seven stars are the angels or the messengers of the seven churches." Who are the angels of the seven churches? Some think that the seven angels are guardian angels, while others think that they are the pastors or ministers of the churches. Now there are guardian angels and there are pastors, but if you will read the letters through as being addresses to the particular angel in each case, you will discover that the angel of the Church cannot mean the guardian angel nor the pastor, for the reason that the blame is all put upon the angel. He is called upon to remember, to repent, and to reform. The angels of the churches represent all those in the churches who constitute the saved element, men and women, young and old who have been born again. The stars then are the angels, and they represent the Church of God on earth in this age from its heavenly view-point. Now you will notice that Christ describes Himself here as the One who holdeth the seven stars in His right hand. The "right hand of Christ" is a symbol expressive of His almighty power. These stars are in His hands, being held by that mighty hand in eternal safety. This was a message that the Church at that time, and in all times required.

You will notice also in this description of Christ that He is depicted as walking in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks, or lampstands. This is

a temple picture. The candlesticks were located in the Holy Place. They belong to earth. They, like the stars, do their work in the night. Just as the stars are heavenly, so the candlesticks are earthly. The Saviour explained the stars in the previous chapter as representing the seven churches. They represent the Church of God from its earthly viewpoint, that is, the Church as we see it and as we know it in history, with its various denominations, divisions, and antagonisms. The Saviour is described as walking in the midst of the golden candlesticks. He is in the midst of the churches, as their life, and bond of union. We have that life and that union upon earth to-day. He is walking in the midst of the churches, and this indicates His conduct, His procedure, His mission in the midst of the Church.

II

Thus we see how Christ appears to the church in Ephesus, and now let us look at Him as He describes Himself before the church in Smyrna. In the church in Ephesus, we have declension; in the church in Smyrna, we have suffering, tribulation, poverty, and blasphemy. The Christians in Smyrna had their property taken away from them, while many of them were imprisoned, tortured, put to death. Christ appears to that church, introducing Himself with a double title. In the first place, He describes Himself as "The first and the

last." This is how He appeared to John on the Island of Patmos. He said to John, "Fear not; I am the first and the last." By first and last He just simply means the beginning and the end. He means that He is the beginning of all things, and that all things tend toward Him, and find their termination in Him. We might say that Christ is the First and Last in creation. He is the Source of it, the Organ of it, and the Bond and End of it. All things that now exist are supported by the word of His power, and creation is the expression of Christ. We also might say that Christ is the First and Last in history and Providence. It was for His sake that God the Father adjusted and related to each other the various dispensations in time. Christ has more to do with the history of this world than many of us think. Then, we can certainly say that Christ is the First and the Last in Redemption. He undertook it; He came to this earth and worked it out by His own blood, and now, by His Holy Spirit, He is realizing it in the lives of those who believe. He is the commencement, the continuance, and the completion of Redemption.

Not only is He described as the first and the last in this letter, for He sets Himself forth also as the One "which was dead, and is alive." There is a reading of this which says, "Which was dead and is alive again." That is not just the thought. I do not think that it is a question here so much of His Resurrection, as it is to the fact that He lived

even while He was dead. Rotherham translates it this way, "Who became dead and lived." Professor Ramsey says that unmistakably this is the proper translation. Christ became dead on the cross. The life of Christ went out while He was there, and He remained dead for a period of seventy-two hours, but during that period, He *lived* in another world, and in a larger life. It is not a question of the resurrection here, that He is presenting to the suffering Christians; He is encouraging them, not with the condition which shall be theirs away in the distant future, but with the position and state which shall be theirs should they be killed in the persecution. You will see that He presents Himself here as the First, the Last, the dead, and the immortal Christ.

III

This leads us to a consideration of the Author of these letters as He introduces Himself to the messenger of the church in Pergamos. At the present time, Pergamos has a population of about thirty thousand souls, but there is no Christian assembly in that city. At the time that the Church was established in that city, the city itself was a seat of Imperial Rome. The Roman governor had his palace and throne there. The symbol of his authority was the sword which indicated that he had the power of life and death. Whom he would, he could keep alive, and whom he would he could

slay. His order was always final and irreversible. The people of Pergamos and of the province in which that city was located, lived in constant terror and dread. It was in that city as Christ said here in this letter, where Satan had his throne. Notwithstanding the fact that it was a wicked city, there were saved men and women in it. They had organized themselves into an assembly of God's people. To this assembly Christ appeared, and introduced Himself as the One "which hath the sharp sword with two edges." The people of Pergamos understood exactly what the sword meant. The sword to them signified absolute sovereignty, the authority of life and death.

You will remember when Christ appeared to John first, He had a sword, a sharp two-edged sword. This sword was not hanging from His girdle and neither was it grasped by His hand. It was held between His teeth, for it says, "Out of his mouth went a sharp two-edged sword." The sword that Christ holds in His mouth now, and has held for two thousand years, is not a steel or iron instrument of war, but rather a word sword. It is His own Truth as included in the Sacred Scriptures. This is not the only place where the Word of God is spoken of as a sword. You will notice that this sword has several qualities. First, it has two edges indicating that it can cut both ways. The one edge of Christ's sword of Truth is prophecy, and the other edge is history. When

there are two edges to a sword, these edges come to a common point which makes the sword sharp at the point to pierce or to thrust. The Word of God, we are informed, is sharp, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, being a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. It is very significant that Christ appeared to this church as a governor with the power of life and death. Of course, He had life for those who were His own, and death for those who were His enemies. He had it then, He has it now.

IV

We come now to see the Author of these letters as He introduces Himself to the church in Thyatira. He said, "These things saith the Son of God, who hath his eyes like unto a flame of fire, and his feet are like unto fine brass." It will be noticed that He assumes the title for Himself, "The Son of God." In the Gospels, Jesus very often claimed the title, "The Son of Man." When He was called the Son of God, it was always by others who applied the title to Him. He never rejected that title, but received it in such a manner as to show that He had a proper claim to it. This is the only place in the New Testament where He applied the title to Himself. He is the Son of God in a very unique sense. He is the Son of God on the physical side of His nature. The angel said to Mary, "The Holy Spirit shall come upon

thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that Holy Thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God" (Luke 1: 35). Here He is given the title, "The Son of God," because on the physical side of His nature, He was born of the Holy Spirit. This makes Christ the Son of God *naturally*. But He is the Son of God also in the *legal* sense. He has a right to all the privileges and obligations of the first born son. We might also say that He is the Son of God in the *ethical* sense, He possessing the feeling, mind, and will of God, the Father. He who possesses an ethical nature like another is in perfect sympathy with that other. In order to have likeness of ethical nature, there must be likeness in the *metaphysical* sense as well. There may be sympathy between a dog and a man, but that sympathy is limited by their unlikeness of nature. There may be sympathy between a man and a woman, and that sympathy may be unlimited because of their likeness of nature. Here Jesus claims to be the Son of God, and this claim is a declaration of perfect sympathy between Himself and the Father, based upon the likeness of nature. He is one with God in essential being, and hence Divine as God is Divine.

We notice that there are two symbolic descriptions of Him here. He is the One "who hath eyes like unto a flame of fire." When John saw Him in the vision as given us in the first chapter,

he noticed that His eyes were like flames of fire. When He will come a second time, His eyes will be like flames of fire. Eyes like flames of fire speak first of intelligence. There is nothing that can escape the flaming eyes of Jesus. All things are naked and open to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do. There was error, immorality, wrong conduct in the church in Thyatira, and Christ knew all about it. But then, the eyes flaming as fire speak also of anger and wrath. One cannot get truly angry without that condition of soul expressing itself in the eyes. Christ sees the evil in this church, and He is aroused to anger on account of it.

The second symbolic description of Christ here has reference to His feet. It says that "His feet are like fine brass." The fine brass mentioned in this passage was an alloy of copper and silver. When copper and silver are combined and put under the action of fire, they reflect light so white and so dazzling that it is insufferable to human gaze. The people of Thyatira knew exactly what this meant because they had in their city at that very time, the copper and silver smelters. The feet, when used as a symbol in the Bible, always illustrate procedure, conduct, behaviour, manner of life. When Christ appeared here with His feet flashing a white light like unto fine brass, that spoke of judicial procedure in view of evil within the life and within the church. The Apostle Peter

speaks of judgment beginning at the House of God, and here we have the announcement that such is about to take place in the church in Thyatira. Oh, that Christ might come to us as individuals and as a Church with flaming eyes, and flashing feet!

V

This brings us over into the third chapter of this book where we have three of these wonderful letters, the first one being the epistle to Sardis. Sardis was located on the summit of the mountain. For centuries, that city was the center of education, wealth, and religion. A church was established in that city, and like many another church, it established for itself a reputation for activity in Christian service. But the church, or a majority of the church, lapsed into the old life of Paganism, and to the angel of the Church Christ appeared, saying, "These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars." In the benediction of the first chapter, the grace and peace mentioned as having been communicated to man, are from "Him which is, and which was, and which is to come; and from the seven Spirits which are before his throne, and from Jesus Christ." Grace and peace are from God the Father, by God the Spirit, through God the Son (1: 4, 5). In the fifth chapter of this book, Christ is presented as being in the midst of the throne, having seven eyes, "which

are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth." The seven Spirits of God is just the Holy Spirit of God. This is a symbolic way of describing the perfection, the holiness of His person and His work. Now this description says that Christ "hath the seven spirits of God." This means that Christ on high and in relation to the Church possesses the Spirit of God, and hath Him to give. When Christ went home on high, He received the fulfillment of the promise that He should possess the Holy Spirit for others, and because of this, He sent down the Holy Spirit at that time, who baptized individual believers into one body by uniting them, first to Christ, their living and glorified Head. To-day Christ has the privilege to baptize with the Holy Ghost, and the Holy Ghost in turn reveals Christ to the human soul.

You will notice in the second part in this symbolic description that the Author of these letters is the One also who hath "the seven stars." In the epistle to the Ephesians, He introduced Himself as holding the seven stars in His right hand. That representation speaks of safety and eternal security. Here, it is not so much safety as security, though that is included, as it is of ownership. The seven stars are here represented as being *His*, and when we remember that the seven stars are a symbol of the saved people of this age whether dead or alive, the picture is most significant. Christ made those who are saved His own by the purchase of

His precious blood, and now they are His, and will be His forever by the authority of His eternal preservation of them.

VI

In the sixth letter, the letter to the church in Philadelphia, there is another description of the Christ. When He appears to the messenger of that church, He said, "These things saith he that is holy, he that is true, he that hath the key of David, he that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth and no man openeth." Here is a wonderful description of Christ. He is first presented as the One who is Holy, or sanctified. To be holy was to be set apart. Before Christ came into the world at all, we read that God sanctified Him or set Him apart for a definite mission to earth. Then, after Christ came into the world, we read that He sanctified Himself, not for His own sake, but for the sake of others. Where Christ did truly sanctify Himself for the redemption of the race was in the Cross. He was holy because He was absolutely set apart from sin. Then in this introduction, He is set forth as the One who is True, that is, real, sincere, trustworthy, and as the truth. He said, "I am the way, and the truth and the life." In other passages we read about Him being the true bread, the true shepherd, the true vine, meaning the real bread, in contradistinction to the symbolic bread; the real shepherd as opposed to

the symbolic shepherd; the real vine as opposed to the symbolic vine. There is nothing more real in the universe to-day, and in the Church to-day than Christ.

In this description of Him, He is spoken of also as the One "that hath the key of David." Keys are frequently used in the Scriptures as a symbol. Christ gave the keys to Peter, and they represented the authority communicated to him as a representative of all the apostles, to open the door of faith unto the Gentiles. Peter was the first to do this on the Day of Pentecost. The whole Church of God has that authority now. When Christ came out of the grave in resurrection, He came forth grasping the keys, and He said to John, "I have the keys of death and of Hades." To have the keys of death and of Hades is to have authority over the grave, and the nether and upper worlds. He is Lord by reason of His resurrection, not only of the living, but of the dead as well. In this passage, it is not the key of the kingdom, and neither is it the key of death nor the key of the other world, but "the key of David." What was the key of David? We must go back into the Old Testament (Isa. 22) to get the real significance of this key. In the reign of Hezekiah, we have it well illustrated. There was an officer in the court who had absolute authority over the treasury. All the jewelry, the precious treasures, the money of the kingdom were under his hand. He wore a robe

and girdle symbolic of his office, and from his girdle hung a key, symbolic of the authority he possessed in the office within the kingdom. He could admit to, or exclude from the throne room, the jewel room, the robe room, and the treasure room. The government of the kingdom was practically in his hands. In some respects, he was equal to and above the king himself.

Now here, Christ presents Himself as having the key of David; that is, He claims authority to open certain doors and to shut certain doors, and when He opens them, none can shut them, and when He shuts them none can open them. What are these doors that Christ has the privilege of opening? There is the door of faith into the human soul and life that only Christ can open. There is the door of understanding, which He alone can open to cause those who are His own to understand the Scriptures. Further, there is the door of opportunity. This seems to be the particular door referred to here, for He was placing before this church the opportunity of evangelizing the community and cities round about. Again, there is the door of privilege into all the riches that there are for Christians in Christ. In fact, He is the treasury of all the perfections of Jehovah, and in Him we are admitted to these perfections.

VII

We come now to the final description of Christ

given here, as the Author of these letters from heaven. This description is four-fold. When He appeared to the messenger of the church in Laodicea, He said, "These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true Witness, the beginning of the creation of God." According to this description, He is the Amen, the Faithful, the True, and the Beginning. The word, "Amen," is the same as the word "Verily," frequently used elsewhere in the New Testament. It represents a kind of seal attached to the pledge or promise made. The word literally means trustworthy. Christ then is the Amen in the sense that He is worthy of full confidence.

Further, He is called the Faithful and True Witness. The word for witness here is our word martyr. Christ was not a martyr in the sense in which we think of martyrs. We think of the dungeon, the stake, and the fire, making martyrs. We think of those who are loyal to conviction or principle to the extent that they will lay down their lives for conviction or principle. But the fire, the stake, the dungeon, or the death, whatever it may be, do not *make* the martyr, but rather *declare* the martyr. Christ in His suffering in life or in death was not made a martyr thereby, but was rather declared a martyr thereby. What we suffer now for principle, truth, conviction, declares us to be faithful and true witnesses. The two adjectives, "faithful and true," here are significant.

Christ is the "true" witness as opposed to the many false witnesses. There were false shepherds in Christ's time, false teachers as there are false ministers and false disciples in this time. He is a true witness because He tells the truth when He testifies. He is also a true witness because He is an eye, ear, and experience witness. But the description says that He is a "faithful" witness as well. To be faithful is to be loyal to the compact. When Christ came into this earth, He came to fulfill the contract which He made with the Father before the world was. He sealed that contract by His own blood on the Cross. He is gone home on high, and ever since by the Holy Spirit, He is fulfilling the contract in saving and sanctifying men and women. Finally, He describes Himself as "the beginning of the creation of God." Christ is not the beginning of the creation of God in a *passive* sense as though He were created Himself by God. He is the beginning of the creation of God in the *active* sense, all things that are, having been brought into existence by His wisdom and power. In Him, all things are held together. From Him, all things came, and to Him all things tend. Christ inhabits creation, and is above and beyond creation.

Now when we sum up the wonderful descriptions of the Author of these letters, we learn that He is the One that holdeth the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden

lampstands, the First and the Last, the One who was dead and yet lived, the One with the sharp sword with two edges, the Son of God who hath His eyes like unto a flame of fire, and His feet like unto fine brass, the One who hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars, the One who is Holy, True, and hath the key of David, the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, and the Beginning of the creation of God.

II

THEIR COMMENDATIONS

(*Revelation 2-3.*)

WE have noticed the Divine Author of these letters as He introduced Himself to each of the seven churches. The way in which He introduced Himself to each of the seven churches in Asia Minor, is the way in which He introduces Himself to the visible Church of God in every place, and at all times throughout this dispensation. It will be of interest to us now to notice several things that He has to say to the churches in Asia Minor and to the churches of all times. We will now run through these letters again, and pick out His commendations of the churches or the truly saved within the churches. We will name the commendations as we did the introductions, after the churches themselves.

I

And in the first place, we will notice the Ephesian commendation. There are several things which the writer of the Ephesian letter knows positively regarding the truly saved or the "Angel" in that particular church. He says, "I know thy *works*." The works referred to doubtless were their ordi-

nary rounds of daily duty. Just what the exact character of these works were, we are not informed. If he referred to their secular business, he was announcing to them that He knew exactly what the character of that business was. He knew what their business was then, as He knows what our business is now. All things in our business life are exposed and opened to Him with Whom we all have to do. We would that all Christians believed that our Lord knows what we are engaged in to-day as He did know at that time. Further He said to them, "I know thy labour." It seems that there is a difference between "works" and "labour." There were some of them at least who were toilers at very heavy tasks, and this meant great burdens and suffering for them. The Lord said that He knew all about their toil and heavy burden bearing. He went on further and said, "I know thy patience." This was their quiet uncomplaining and unswerving endurance under suffering. They were suffering greatly at the hands of their taskmasters. Many of them had been driven to their service by the lash of their master and they endured it all patiently for Christ's sake. They were not in business merely for the sake of supporting their families, nor for the sake of the church of which they were members. They were in business for the sake of their glorified Lord, and hence their patient suffering. The Saviour said that He knew all about that.

As we go on a little further in the verse that contains the Ephesian commendation, we notice that He praised them for their intolerance of evil by saying, "And how thou canst not bear them which are evil." There were those who made their appearance among them, making profession of faith in Christ, when in heart and life they were not genuine, but rather counterfeit. There were some who appeared in their midst declaring themselves to be apostles, but the saved people in the church put them under the test of Scripture and experience and found them to be false; and so could not tolerate them, but rejected them from their fellowship. This is the exercise on the part of the Church of her true disciplinary prerogatives.

Now when the Lord said, "I know," in each of these and other cases, it is not meant that He knew only after an intellectual fashion, but that He knew in an experimental way as well. He knew their works, labour, patience, and intolerance of evil because He Himself had experienced those works, labour, patience, and intolerance of evil, and knowing these things, He sympathizes with those who experience them. This ought to be an encouragement as well as a commendation for every believer upon Christ.

And now, further, He said, "And hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name sake, hast laboured and not fainted." They had borne suffering patiently, had endured trial with joy, had

laboured persistently and honestly, and at no time had become discouraged, and that all, not for their own glory or self-advantage of any kind, but rather for the sake of the glorious person and work of their Lord. Christ is the Saviour, the Master, the Teacher, the Example, the Advocate, the Intercessor, and the Coming Lord of every one who believes. They rendered their work for Him alone whom they loved so much. Their persistent fidelity to Him had not always been in circumstances that were easy. They had passed through severe trial and persecution that had raged around them, and yet they had maintained their loyalty to the person of their Lord. This is how it was then in the church in Ephesus, and how it ought to be in every church in the world to-day. When this condition obtains in the life of a believer to-day, or in a company of believers organized into a church, there is the same commendation from the Lord for that believer and for that church.

II

This brings us to a consideration of the Smyranean Commendation. This is found in the ninth verse of the second chapter. He said to the angel of that church, "I know thy works and tribulation, and poverty (but thou art rich), and I know the blasphemy of them which say that they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan." In this commendation He asserts His ex-

haustive knowledge of several things regarding them. As He said to the church in Ephesus, "I know thy works," so now He says to the church in Smyrna, "I know thy works." The works here doubtless refer to the ordinary round of daily duty in which these Christians were engaged at that time. We learn from some of the inscriptions that many of those people at that time were carpenters, bricklayers, stone masons, goldsmiths, silversmiths, and some worked on the land. Over these Christians were placed cruel, pagan, and Jewish taskmasters, who drove their slaves to their tasks as animals and beasts of burden. It would appear that the church in Smyrna constituted a great labouring class who were oppressed by their employers on every hand. It must have been a real comfort to them to learn afresh that Christ knew their works experimentally, He having endured in like manner what they were passing through. He, therefore, could pray for them, and help them as otherwise it was not possible.

He went on further in His commendation and said, "I know thy tribulation." The word "tribulation" here is a strong one, and not very often used in the Scriptures. It signifies a heavy pressure of persecution. Jesus did not say, "I know thy trials, the occasional testings of faith, but thy tribulation." Our word "tribulation" suggests the stroke of a Roman whip, but the word that the Master used here suggests rather, the pressure of

the stones that grind the wheat, or that force the blood out of the grape. It is a word that is athrob with significance. These people were being pressed even to death on account of their loyalty to Christ, and as He introduces Himself to the Church, He says in infinite tenderness, "I know thy tribulation." He knew their tribulation not merely by observing it with the physical eye, but by having passed through it Himself while here upon the earth. There is no trial nor tribulation common to the child of God now, that was not experienced by the Son of God while He was here upon the earth. We can go further and say that there is no trial or sorrow common now to the child of God that is foreign to Christ. In our sorrows, He is made sorrowful; in our joys, He is made joyful.

Furthermore, you will notice in the Smyranean commendation that He commends for their poverty. He says, "I know thy poverty." The word "poverty" in this passage signifies real beggary. It has no reference to poverty of spirit. These people had been made poor and that on account of their loyalty to the person and work of Christ. Perhaps they had suffered the loss of all things in the persecution that had broken out against them. They had houses and lands, and these houses and lands had been taken from them on account of their faith. They had trade, and in many cases it meant a successful business. They had social position and everything else that was

necessary to life, but all of these they lost because of their adherence to the Gospel of Christ. Now when Christ said to them, "I know thy poverty," He surely, too, was speaking from experience. He was rich and for our sakes He became poor. While here on the earth He possessed nothing. He was born in a manger where cattle and horses stood and fed. He was the child of a poor peasant girl, Mary of Nazareth. In His life, the foxes had holes, and the birds of the air had nests, but He, the Son of Man and the Son of God had no shelter for His head. When He came to die, His body was placed in a borrowed tomb, and His clothes were gambled for and given away. He knew what it was to be without home, earthly possessions, trade, social position, and food, and so He could say truly, "I know thy poverty."

There was one thing more that He knew about the angel of the church in Smyrna, for He said, "I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews and are not, but are of the synagogue of Satan." There were those connected with the church in Smyrna who professed to be Jews, but they were Jews in name and dress only. There are two kinds of Jews, the real Jews, those who have descended naturally from Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and the professed spiritual Jews. The professed spiritual Jews are those who profess themselves to be children of God and are not in reality what they profess themselves to be. They are

represented by those who profess faith in Christ, have been baptized, have joined the Church, are religious in their habits to a degree, and engage in certain forms of Christian service. The Apostle Paul speaks of these (Rom. 2: 28, 29) when he says, "He is not a Jew which is one *outwardly*," that is, in dress, in speech, in appearance, in conduct; neither is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh: but he is a Jew which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, by the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men but of God. The true Jew in a spiritual sense is a member of any race of men who has been circumcised in the heart by the Holy Spirit of God, being made thereby a child of God, through Divine Grace. In Smyrna, side by side, and perhaps under the same roof where the true saints of God met, there was a synagogue of Satan, made up of false, counterfeit, spiritual Jews. These false Christians were reviling or blaspheming the true Christians. The true people of God in Smyrna were suffering much from the hands, the words, and the conduct of those who professed to be one with them. There are those to-day who have their names enrolled on local church registers, thereby professing themselves to be true Christians, when in fact they are false. They are, in many cases, the bitterest enemies of those who truly love the Lord.

The use of the word "blasphemy" in this passage is somewhat peculiar. Evidently the Lord

used the word, not in its specific sense as against God, but in its simplest sense, that of reviling or slandering. When the synagogue of the Jews in Smyrna saw that the true Christians there were poor, they issued all manner of libellous statements concerning them as to their character, their purpose, and their modes of life. These false stories aroused the pagan population, and there followed the confiscation of their goods, which had reduced them to the point of actual want. If you have ever had libellous statements circulated regarding you, then you will know to a degree what this means. The Saviour had such statements circulated about Him, some even saying that He was a glutton and a drunkard. When He said, therefore, "I know this blasphemy," He meant that He knew it by experience, He having frequently suffered from the same thing.

There is one thing more in this Smyranean commendation that we must not pass over. It is put in brackets, and it consists only of four words. He said, "but thou art rich." He offers them no solution of the problem of their pain. In this connection His commendation of them consists in silence. He has no word of rebuke for them. The value of this part of the commendation depends on the fact that it was the living, glorified Christ who uttered it. These people had absolutely no material possessions, and yet Christ said unto them, "Thou art rich." When Christ says people are rich, they

are rich indeed. There are different kinds of riches in the spiritual realm, and these people were wealthy in them all. There is the wealth of God's goodness (Rom. 2: 4), the wealth of God's glory (Rom. 9: 23), the wealth of God's wisdom and knowledge (Rom. 11: 33), the wealth of God's Grace (Eph. 1: 7; 2: 7), and the wealth of faith. These people though they were in beggary as far as this world's goods were concerned, were the real "plutocrats" of God, being abundantly affluent in His wealth, the limit of which is the unsurpassing glory of Christ. He commends them for being thus rich. It is the privilege of every child of God to be rich in this sense and such riches always call forth the praise and glory of Jesus Christ.

III

The next Commendation before us is that addressed to the church in Pergamos (2: 13). It reads, "I know thy works, and where thou dwellest, even where Satan's seat is; and thou holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith even in those days when Antipas was my faithful martyr, who was slain among you where Satan dwellest." Here are several things. Like the previous churches, they are commended first for their "works," which doubtless is a reference to their daily tasks. Many of these tasks were difficult and burdensome, and Christ knew experi-

mentally all about them. He was pleased with the "works" of the faithful few in the Pergamos church. Then He knew where each and all of them dwelt or lived. He knew their street, their locality, and the very name and number of each of their homes. He also knew their places of assembly as well as their places of business. Where these people dwelt or made their home was where Satan had his throne. In order to understand this reference, we must bear in mind that Pergamos at that time was the seat of authority in Asia Minor of Imperial Pagan Rome. The Roman Governor, the one who had the power of life and death, had his palace in Pergamos. Doubtless this is the reference when Christ makes mention of Satan's seat or throne. One tries to work out an argument to locate geographically the very country in which Satan has his throne during this age, and he makes that country America. I do not think that he, or any other, has any right to make such an application of this reference. We know from other passages that Satan is the prince of the power of the air, and that he is also the prince or ruler of this world. The social order is organized by Satan, and federated under him, and doubtless he has his throne of authority, not in any particular country, not in any particular city, but in and above the social order itself, politically, industrially, and even religiously, as we live in them and see them around about us to-day. A few Christians at that time

lived in the city of Pergamos and Satan had his throne there, and now those few Christians have multiplied into millions and they have scattered throughout the Pergamos of the social order, and are literally living where Satan has his seat. In Pergamos at that time, those Christians were faithful to their Lord notwithstanding the authority of Satan being localized there. Christ commends them for such faithfulness, and He commends all Christians for like faithfulness in this very day. Notwithstanding the power of Satan, they held fast to Christ's name and they did not deny His faith, and that even in the days when persecution was at its height, when Antipas, Christ's faithful martyr, had been slain. They had been true to Christ's glorious person notwithstanding all. They believed in the Deity, the Atoning Death, the literal Resurrection, the real Ascension of Christ to glory, and the present glorified humanity of Christ at the right hand of the Father. They did not swerve one iota from their confession of the faith and the name of their Lord. On account of their patient endurance under persecution, on account of their loyalty to the person and doctrine of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Saviour praises them, and blesses them. Thus does He commend believers to-day.

IV

This leads us to the fourth Commendation, the one addressed to the church in Thyatira (2: 19).

It reads as follows: "I know thy works, and charity (or love), and service, and faith, and thy patience, and thy works; and the last to be more than the first." There are a number of things for which He commends the angel or the truly saved people in this church. He commends them for their "works," and He mentions their "works" twice. All of these churches have many works. We are not informed whether these works were religious, philanthropic, or secular. He may have had exclusive reference to their ordinary business in life. They were doubtless good works, or Christ would not have commended these people for them. Good works in the estimate of Christ are tasks performed having Him in mind. He commends them also for their love, their love for God the Father, their love for Him the Son, their love for the brethren, their love for the Word of God, and their love for the salvation of the lost. Further, He commends them for their faith. This may mean their faith in the sense of trust, trust of heart and mind which reposes itself in Him as the object of confidence. Or it may mean their faith in the sense of teaching or doctrine. Right conduct always issues from right teaching. Where there is soundness of doctrine, Christ always commends and gives praise for the same. And, further, He praises them for their ministry and service. What the character of their ministry and service was, we are not informed. It may have

had a wonderful variety. It may have been a ministry of prayer upon behalf of others, the ministry of sacrifice for the brethren, the ministry of social service in relation to their fellow believers, or the ministry of making the Gospel known to their fellow citizens near and far. Whatever their ministry was, it would indicate at least that they were active and aggressive in Christian service and that they were commended by the Saviour for such service. He also commended them for their patience, which is persevering, uncomplaining endurance against opposition and under trial. The Christians of Thyatira suffered greatly from the various guilds or orders in that city, but they were patient and consistent in their confession of the Truth throughout it all, and because of this, the Saviour commends them by saying, "I know." Let us all keep in mind that when there is ground for commendation, the Saviour will always commend accordingly.

V

We pass now to the Commendation of the angels of the churches in Sardis and Philadelphia. There is no commendation of the church or any part of the church in Laodicea, the reason being that the church in that city had totally apostatized from a true Christian faith and from a genuine Christian experience. The commendation in the Sardean letter is found in the fourth verse, and reads, "Thou

hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments . . . they are worthy." In this commendation there are two things, a description and a declaration. The description is of a faithful remnant in that church which says they "have not defiled their garments," and the declaration is "they are worthy." A man's clothing is that in which he lives, that which is the nearest to him, that in which he moves, acts, and expresses himself. The clothing referred to here is not literal garments. There is a kind of clothing that does not come from the weaver's loom. It is that which is around us, that in which we live and act in the world. This kind of clothing is constituted by our circumstances, relations, positions, and associations in life. Every living soul has these, and there is absolutely no one who is naked in this respect. Christianity is not a divestiture of one's self, of domestic, social, and other relations. All natural surroundings and honest pursuits with all the cares of this life constitute our spiritual and social dress. All the sorrows and trials that these surroundings bring us are for our comfort, usefulness, and glory. These are our proper and Divinely woven livery, and they are intended to warm, protect, and to beautify us. They are intended to ennoble, not to degrade. They have a spiritual aim and value when they are properly managed. Our business as Christians is not to cast them off, but to wear them, to live in them, to

act in them, to express Christ through them, and also to keep them from being defiled.

In this world, there is a constant tendency to defilement. Silver will tarnish unless there be constant effort to keep it clean; and our positions, relations, and associations are all liable to defilement if we are not constantly on our guard. Even the most costly and best of clothes are liable to take up filth, contagion, impurity and disease. There is absolutely no putting forth of life on earth without it being exposed to uncleanness. This is so in society, in the home, in business, and even in the Church. It belongs, therefore, to Christianity not to try and get away from ordinary life, but to live, act, and work in such a manner, and in such a spirit as to save our surroundings from becoming defiled. If the Church is dead and corrupt, that is no reason why individuals in the Church should become dead and corrupt. If others go into the mud and filth, there is no occasion for us to follow them. Joseph maintained himself from first to last in purity before God, notwithstanding the fact that there was corruption all around about him. Daniel also maintained his purity unimpeachable through dynasty after dynasty of the corrupt Babylonian Empire for a period of about sixty-eight years. It is impossible to travel without dust; rust will settle on the purest metal, but we need not keep the dust on us nor permit the rust to eat the metal up. By faith, by prayer, by Bible study,

and by real exercise in holy effort, these "few" people in Sardis managed not to degrade, to defile their positions in life, and so the Risen One appears and commends them most highly for it. They were not lured by these siren songs of worldly compromise. They kept close and true to Christ in all their positions, relations, and associations in life, and hence the description, they "have not defiled their garments."

Comparatively speaking, the persons who were thus described in the Sardean church were few in number, but, though few in number, and hidden away among so many who were dead, Christ had not forgotten nor overlooked them. Jesus knows those who are His own, however few and humble they may be. It makes no difference how bad and dead the church is in which they hold membership, He knows them, blesses them, and preserves them for the eternal glory. The few may be the least popular and influential in the church of which they are members, and yet the Lord knows them, vindicates them, and declares them "worthy." The most despised on earth are often the most honoured in heaven. It matters not for the standing of men in the eyes of the world, nor the eyes of a dead and dying church, provided that they possess the Risen Life of Christ, and are practically exercising themselves according to that life. Such characters are never unknown to Christ, and His favour is with them throughout all of their

trials. Because of their faithfulness to Christ, and their purity in Him, notwithstanding the corruption all about them, the Saviour commends them and makes them a promise of eternal fellowship with Himself. What He commended at that time, He commends in all times and in all places throughout this age.

VI

We have seen in the church at Sardis how Christ commended a "few," because they had remained faithful to Christ in spite of immorality all around them; in the church in Philadelphia, there is a commendation of praise for faithfulness to Christ in spite of strong and bitter opposition (3:8). Jesus had set before this church a door of opportunity which some human and demoniacal force was trying to shut. Christ had opened the door for them, and had pledged Himself to keep it open by His Almighty power. Though evil forces were trying to shut the door of opportunity and privilege against the church in Philadelphia, the Mighty Lord was on their side. He had opened the door and all the powers of men and devils were unable to close it. It would seem that these Christians were going in and redeeming the opportunities for Christ and availing themselves of their privileges in Christ. On account of their insistence, their persistence, their zeal in going in through this open door, the Saviour speaks words to them of high

commendation. He says, "I know thy works: behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it: for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name." In reference to this door of opportunity and privilege which the Lord had opened for them and is keeping open for them, and through which they were passing into opportunities for Him and privileges for themselves, He commends for several things. He said, first, "Thou hast a little strength." They were weak numerically, influentially, socially, and perhaps spiritually, and hence, were condemned by the pagan, unsaved peoples about them as of little or no account. There are little groups of Christian people to-day scattered throughout the world that are condemned by the world as of no account. Notwithstanding their little strength, they remained faithful, and went through the door, and redeemed the opportunity for their Lord. There are doors of opportunity and privilege placed before the churches to-day, and those who go in of the churches and take the opportunities for Christ are the ones who are most surely commended by Christ.

But He also commends the Angel of this church for keeping His word in spite of bitter opposition against it and them. "Thou hast kept my word." Christ's word is His uttered thought as summed up in His and the Holy Spirit's teaching, and to keep that word is to know, believe, practice, proclaim, and preserve it from all the attacks of the enemy.

The particular word of Christ which these people had kept is described in the tenth verse. There He said, "Thou hast kept the word of my *patience*." Christ's patience is His quiet, uncomplaining endurance of suffering under trial. Yes, Christ's patience is His forbearance with the wicked. His restraint of judgment upon the wicked was seen in His attitude toward the wicked when He was under trial before them. He was blasphemed, spit upon, buffeted, whipped, and in mockery crowned a king, and He kept silence. Christ is rejected now, and He is keeping silence, but there is a day coming which God hath appointed. In that day, Christ will no longer keep silence, but shall appear in glory with the voice of the archangel. To keep the word of Christ's patience is to suffer uncomplainingly for His sake. Further, to keep the word of Christ's patience signifies the proclamation of the full Gospel message. Surely these people in Philadelphia were delighted, were made happy on account of this sublime Commendation of Christ.

The Commendations in and throughout these epistles are just samples of the commendations that Christ has and proclaims to-day. When the group of Christians are faithful to Him and to His Word and works, when they suffer uncomplainingly under trial for His sake, when they are true to His name and to His faith and sacrifice for His cause, the Saviour commends them for it. Those commendations are realized within, and they are proclaimed without.

III

THEIR COMPLAINTS

(*Revelation 2-3.*)

DISHONEST, fulsome praise is always an evil. It has a bad moral effect upon him who gives it and is a great evil to him who receives it; but candid, truthful, and liberal commendation of what is right and good has a blessed result in him who gives it as well as in him who receives it. It draws the two parties together and it always stimulates effort. It begets mutual confidence, and greatly increases strength. It opens a community of feeling which makes the correction of faults easy. It serves to correct despondency, and to encourage and cheer. It helps also to build up love, good-will and virtue. Truthful and honest commendation is always a blessing. It inspires happiness in the one who gives it, and produces happiness in the one who receives it. What a real blessing it was to those churches or to the individuals in those churches that Christ commended them as He did! How they would exercise themselves to correct what was defective that they might stand approved before Him in all things!

But the truthful, tender, and honest commendation given by Christ to these churches or to individuals or little groups in those churches prepared the way for Him to point out their faults. Though these churches had many virtues they also had many faults and failings, which real love could not avoid mentioning and disapproving. Though the Saviour had high commendation for them, He still found it necessary to say to five of the churches, "Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee." He made no complaint against any defect in the churches of Smyrna, and Philadelphia, the suffering and missionary churches of the group. In this dispensation there has been no such thing as a perfect church in which there are no weaknesses and no defective members. In practically all churches, there are defects of organization and administration. There are backsliding members and some unworthy people. Some churches are much better than others, but none are up to the standard of perfection set for them by the Lord. On the field of history, the Church is always a mixed society of people possessing both virtues and faults.

We will now make another survey of these Letters from Heaven looking for the faults and defects of the churches that Christ points out and complains of. There are five of these complaints, some of which are simple and others of which are complex.

I

In the first place, we will notice the Complaint made against the angel of the church in Ephesus. He says (2: 4), "Nevertheless, I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love." The church in Ephesus had works, toil, patience and orthodoxy. They had tried and expelled some who were false apostles, yet the living Lord was conscious of an incipient disease there which others doubtless did not know. The disease was working back in the moral and emotional nature of many of the members of that church. It was the declension of love. "I have somewhat against thee because thou hast left thy first love." This complaint is made in a brief, positive, and plain manner. Christ goes to the very heart of their trouble. What is first love, and what is it to lose first love? First love is the love of espousal. It is always simple in the highest sense, always supreme, always engrossing. At times, more than at other times, it ravishes the soul with delight. It rejoices in the hope of full realization. It cheers the heart, buoys the spirit. First love is always marital. The apostle said to the Corinthian church, "I have espoused you to one husband that I might present thee a pure virgin to Christ, but I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve in his craftiness, your mind should be corrupted from the simplicity and purity that is toward Christ." To have our

minds corrupted from the simplicity and purity that is in Christ is to suffer the loss of first love. First love is always pure. There is no unholy, no ulterior motive behind first love. This church had strong, supreme, and simple love for the person, work, and offices of Christ. They also had a supreme love for the Word, people, and work of Christ; but they had suffered the loss of that love. With the decline of that love in their hearts, there was the loss of their first works. This is always the case. Our Lord complains to these saved men and women concerning their loss or decline in their first love. He saw it, He felt it, and was grieved concerning it. Loving the Church as He did supremely and commending the Church as He did so highly, He cannot avoid making the complaint against them, that they are not as ardent toward Him, His Word, and His work, as they had been at the beginning of their Christian life. Let us ask ourselves personally, "Have I declined from my first love to the person, the word, and the work of Christ?" Are we just as enthusiastic now as we were in the beginning of our Christian life? If not, Christ knows it, and He feels it. He cannot avoid saying to each of us, "I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love."

II

This leads us to the significant Complaint made against the angel or the saved element in the

church located in Pergamos (2: 14, 15). He said, "But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to cast a stumbling-block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication. So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes which thing I hate." The Lord is very tender, as He always is in discovering and exposing the faults of His people. He spoke of the fault in Ephesus as being "*somewhat*"; He spoke of the faults in this church as being a "*few*." We will need to separate the faults specified here, for there are two at least. The first one is described as "The doctrine of Balaam." What was the doctrine or teaching of Balaam? Balaam, you will remember, was a heathen prophet who possessed Divine gifts. He was sent for by Balak, the king of Moab, to come and to curse the people of the Lord. At first, God told him not to go, and for a time he submitted, but he was anxious to go and much more so because there was offered to him a great sum of money. When he insisted on going, finally God told him that he might go, but he was to speak only the words Divinely commanded. He went according to God's Divine permissive decree, but was restrained from cursing the people of the Lord. When he found that he could not curse them, and so obtain the money offered, he taught Balak how the people of God

could bring the curse of God upon themselves. This he did by setting a stumbling-block or snare for the Lord's people. He taught Balak, the king of Moab, a worshipper of idols, to make feasts and to offer sacrifices unto his gods. Then he advised him to invite to these feasts the Hebrew young men and young women, and to enter into political alliances with them by inter-marriage. This Balak did, and the people of the Lord, and the pagan peoples who denied the Lord sat down together at the same table, thus fraternizing with each other. They danced around the same feasts together and worshipped and served the same idols together. This aroused the anger of Jehovah against His people with the result that they cursed themselves and brought down the wrath of God upon them. That literally took place in history away back in the time of Moses.

And now that historical event in the time of Moses is made a symbol of a certain condition or event in our time. There doubtless were those in the church at Pergamos who counselled fellowship with the pagan world. They claimed that the only way to win the pagan world to Christ was to enter into alliances with the pagan world. Others in the church doubtless claimed that to enter into alliances with the pagan world would result in the pagan world paganizing the Church instead of the Church Christianizing the pagan world. Here we have the beginning of the union of the Church and

state. Balaamism is simply worldliness. There have always been certain ones who advised that the only way to win the world is to give the world the privilege of entering the Church. They advise feasting together, inter-marriage and inter-business relationships.

A few days ago I was told of a church in which the Young People's Society, after their service, supposedly devotional, cleared away the chairs and danced an hour. I was told of another church which after the Prayer Service was completed, cleared away the chairs and danced for an hour. A pastor telephoned me a few days ago and said that a class in his Sunday school, most of whom were members of his church, had a class party, and the chief items on the program were dancing and card-playing. The sad thing about this is that the majority of that church supports it. Now those who participate in such a kind of life within the church and go into the world to practice it, as well as those who support it, and yet profess to be Christians are Balaamites in the spiritual sense. They are not the Lord's people though their names are enrolled with the Lord's people. These Balaamites were members of the church in Pergamos. What the Saviour complained about first in this case was that the angel and truly saved and separate element in the church allowed the Balaamites to continue in membership. The church was very lax in the practice of discipline. Their roll should

have been cleared of all the Balaamite members. The Saviour is grieved over the attitude and spirit of the saved people in the Church toward those that only profess to be saved, and are therefore hypocrites.

Not only did they consent to the presence and teaching of Balaamism in the Church, but they also allowed the doctrine or teaching of the Nicolaitanes, which doctrine the Saviour said He hated. In the letter to the church in Ephesus, we read about the "*deeds*" of the Nicolaitanes which Christ also hated. Christ hates as well as loves. There cannot be a true love without a true hate. What were deeds in the church in Ephesus come to be "*doctrine*" or teaching in the church in Pergamos. But who or what were the Nicolaitanes? It is difficult to answer that question. Some think that there was one, at that time, by the name of Nicolas who gathered about him a few followers and so established a sect within the church called by his name. Such a sect cannot be found. Some think that there was no such party in existence at that time, but that it did come into existence at a later time, and so this is a prophetic reference rather than a historic one. But it seems to me that there must have been at that time, in that church of Pergamos, a number of men and women who had their names enrolled on that church register who were known as Nicolaitanes and they believed, practiced, and taught the doctrine of Nico-

laitanism. If there had been no such party in the church or known to the angel of the church, the Lord could not have spoken as He did. The word "Nicolaitane" is very significant. It has two parts, the first "Nikao," which means to conquer, to subdue, to subordinate. This part of the word would indicate that there were some things, some one, or perhaps some ones, who had the upper hand in the church in Pergamos and were dominating or ruling all the rest. The second part of the word is "Laos," which means the people, and the complete word would indicate the idea of some one or something, or even some clique which had the control over the rest of the people in the church. This would indicate that there was an element in that church already who tried, and who did dominate all the rest. In many churches, even to-day, you will find a social clique which dominates all the rest of the membership. You will find in some places a national, or racial clique, men and women of a certain nation or race who seek to dominate all the others in the church. You will find in some places, also, a real money clique who are Nicolaitanes in this sense. Then we come down through the ages in the history of the Church, and look around in our time, and we see a clerical clique which makes a distinction between God's people as clergy and laity. This is common in the Roman Catholic Church, in the Episcopal Church, in the Lutheran Church, and in many another supposedly Evan-

gelical church as well. Wherever you see the rise and operations of a clique of any kind in a local assembly of God's people, there you have Nicolaitanism. Balaamism was *worldliness* invading the Church; Nicolaitanism was *autocracy* within the Church, the Church being subdued or conquered by the few. These are the two things that Christ complains against the church in Pergamos, and He hates them, and what He hates and would cast out, the true people of God ought to hate and put under judgment at once.

III

This leads us to the Complaint made against the church in Thyatira (2: 20-24). In full, it reads, "Notwithstanding, I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols. And I gave her space to repent of her fornication; and she repented not. Behold, I will cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation except they repent of their deeds. And I will kill her children with death; and all the churches shall know that I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts: and I will give unto every one of you according to your works. But unto you I say, and unto the rest in Thyatira, as many as have not this doctrine, and which have not

known the depths of Satan, as they speak; I will put upon you none other burden."

He complained that the saved people in this church "suffered," that is "tolerated" or let alone a woman by the name of Jezebel. That woman in the church of Thyatira was not a real woman, nor an individual man or woman. The name Jezebel represented a number of a certain class. In Old Testament history we have a woman by that name who was the wife of Ahab, the king of Israel. She was not a Jewess, not a Samaritan, but a Phoenician, and a worshipper of Baal. She introduced Baal worship into Israel, and had such power over her husband, the king of Israel, that he was a mere puppet in her hands. She became a persecutor of the Lord's prophets, at the same time maintaining upwards of a thousand prophets of Baal in the court of Israel and at her own table. We are informed that there was none like unto Ahab for doing evil in the presence of the Lord, "Whom his *wife* stirred up." She evidently was the instigator of practically all the evil which brought down the wrath of God upon the nation.

It would appear that the Old Testament Jezebel is used here as a symbol of a certain party, great or small, in the church of Thyatira. But there is another explanation of this symbolic figure. In Thyatira, there was a temple dedicated to a certain god in which there was a woman, queen of that temple, who was known as Jezebel. She was

given that name because of her immoralities, and became the apt symbol of all kinds of wickedness. Let us therefore dismiss from our minds that this woman was a person, an individual, or even a group of individuals. She stands for a principle, a party or a system that was dominating and influencing the church in Thyatira, leading the people into judgment, and into a loss of testimony.

In this lengthy complaint, let us notice several distinct things concerning this woman. We notice in the first place, that she was a wife. This is what the word "woman" signifies in the passage. This cannot mean that she was the wife of the pastor of the church, as some think, but rather that she held a relationship to this church like that which Queen Jezebel held to her husband in the Old Testament time, or such as Queen Jezebel held in the temple of Thyatira in connection with those who were her victims. Further, you will observe that she was a self-styled prophetess. This would indicate that whatever the system or party was, it claimed Divine authority and inspiration for its existence, methods, and teaching. She claimed to be a prophetess in the sense of teaching with Divine authority and foretelling future events. This is precisely what the founder of Seventh-Dayism claims, what the founder of Christian Science claims, and what the founders of many other erroneous cults claim. Once again, we notice that she

was known for her impurity of life and conduct, for she was guilty of teaching and practicing the nameless sin of fornication. This was fornication not in the literal sense, but rather in the spiritual sense, which was always apostasy, and an estrangement from God, followed by a false and heathenish worship. Not only did she practice and teach such herself, but she was successful in deceiving and seducing many of the servants of God to do the same. She also taught and practiced eating things sacrificed to idols. The first sin speaks of impurity, and false worship. The second sin speaks of compromise with the world, and fellowship with the world in its manner of life.

Not only did she teach such things, but she persisted in the practice of them. The Lord said that He gave her space to repent of her evil, but she determined not to repent. Why she refused to repent, we are not told. It may be that she had formed the habit of sinning to such an extent that it was impossible for her to repent of her sins. Perhaps there was a motive which she held in view in her teaching and practice that caused her to refuse the privileges of mercy. The passage says that she had children and hence she was not only a wife but a mother. These would be her offspring, or those who became her disciples. She had also had many lovers, for they practiced adultery with her. These children and these sinners along with her were those who taught and practiced what she

did, taking her as an example in their way and manner of sin.

Now the question arises, what does this woman represent to-day? She certainly stands for impurity. She stands for a civilization and a religion which ignores and repudiates Jesus Christ as Saviour and Redeemer. In this woman we see the world power or the world principle completely dominating and influencing the Church. Jezebel in the Old Testament time stirred up her husband to commit all kinds of evil; the world principle throughout this dispensation at times and in various places has stirred up the Church to practice all kinds of evil. In the previous letter, we saw how autocracy had gotten into the assembly of God's people, the few dominating the many, and how compromise had come in, the people of God being led astray in fraternizing with the world. In this complaint our Lord makes, we see the world power securely entrenched *within* the Church, and the truly saved of God's people crushed beneath its feet.

But, according to this complaint, what is to be the end of all this? Now we see the Saviour with His eyes like a flame of fire, flashing in anger, and proceeding on those feet of brass. Because this woman, her lovers, and her children will not repent, she is to be cast forcibly into a bed, not the bed of sickness, not the bed of rest, not the bed of guilty pleasure, but into the bed of pain which is

the bed of hell. This is the ultimate doom of the world power which dominates the Church of God to-day. Her lovers are to be cast into great tribulation, and her children are to be killed with the pestilence of death. The world power will not always dominate the Church. The Church will be victorious when Christ is triumphant.

IV

The fourth Complaint made in the letters from heaven is against the angel in the church at Sardis (3: 1 c). It reads, "I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead." This complaint is weighted with significance. With a vastly different meaning now, we read the words, "I know." Prior to this, the tone of these words was full of tenderness and compassion; now we can almost hear the wail of a broken heart in them. The church in Sardis was not without works. In fact, the church was full of works, or activities, which had won for it the reputation throughout the land of being alive. Perhaps this church had also much wealth, and with that wealth it was liberal in its contributions for every good cause. No fault was found with the orthodoxy of this church, for seemingly it was sound in organization and doctrine. It was not censured for giving place to false teachers nor for harbouring counterfeit and unworthy members. That church, from all indications, was orderly, peaceful, respectable, digni-

fied, and influential. Externally, there was nothing lacking in this church, but things are not always deserving of the credit which they receive. When the church had the appearance and reputation of being a living and active church, it was in reality, to a great extent, dead. It was dead or dying as respects true spirituality. It had the form of life, but was devoid of the power thereof. There was nothing lacking in the outward manifestation of life, and yet Christ said, "And thou art dead." Christ always seeks for the spirit of life, and when He does not find that in the individual, or in the church, He finds absolutely nothing that satisfies His loving heart. It is not so bad to be dead and to know it, as to have the decomposing skeleton clothed with feigned life. There may be correct church order and orthodoxy of doctrine, and yet spiritual and moral death. There may be a name for living a life of godliness, and yet the true life of the Holy Spirit may be absent from the soul. There is such a thing as impressing others with the idea that all is well with us, while at the same time, the hand of death may be gripping our spiritual nature. A corpse can be galvanized into the motions of life while it is as dead as a stone. We all need to test ourselves as Christians by this complaint of Christ, lest, having a name to live, like many in the church of Sardis, we should yet be dead.

There was everything in the church in Sardis

that pleased all the members of that church, and all outside observers; but there was practically nothing in that church that was a pleasure to the heart of the Risen Redeemer. He said to them, "I have found no works of thine fulfilled before my God." Fulfilled works before God are works performed by us which have been accepted by God, and are a pleasure unto Him. None of their works, though many, and of a great variety, and excellent in themselves, gave pleasure to God; none were accepted by Him. Was there no prayer? Yes, much, doubtless, in their homes and prayer meetings, but their prayers did not reach the Holy of Holies in Glory. Was there no singing? Yes, much, and doubtless the music was the finest obtainable, but not a solitary symphony of that music was heard before the throne. Was there no giving for the Lord's work on the part of the church in Sardis? That was a rich church, and hence there must have been great giving, but that giving was not recorded within the sanctuary above. Everything that they did stopped short of the presence of God. The deacons, trustees, young people, and women societies all had their meetings, and that at regular intervals and in perfect order, but nothing was done, nothing finished, nothing fulfilled. There was much activity along many lines, but absolutely nothing reached perfection. There was nothing in that church that satisfied the Divine heart. Why? There was a lack, and a total lack,

of spirituality. Things were done in that church apart from Christ, not having Christ in mind. Their works were performed in the energy of the flesh, and not in the power of the Holy Spirit, and hence our Lord's complaint, "Thou hast a name that thou livest and art dead;" and, "I have not found thy works perfect before God."

V

This brings us to the final Complaint in these letters. For the church in Laodicea, there is no praise, no commendation of any kind. The reason for this is manifest in the complaint our Lord makes against the church. To that church He said, "I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth. Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked." In this complaint we have three things, and all about the church in Laodicea. There is a real spiritual condition of the church which is lukewarmness. "Thou art neither cold nor hot." The word "cold" here signifies chilly or frozen, while the word "hot" has the meaning of very warm or boiling. The church in Laodicea was neither cold nor hot, neither chilly nor boiling. There was just a

little warmth. Their temperature had been lowered by evaporation. They had a little love, a little zeal, a little passion. They were not totally indifferent toward the things of God. The church was not characterized by fervent love, passion, zeal. Its membership was lukewarm, that is, tepid in its spiritual life. They had some interest in Divine truth and very slightly they responded to the claims of the Gospel. Professedly at least, they were Christians, being interested somewhat in the things of Christ. They had been baptized and joined the church, and perhaps some of them had been converted, but they are not up to the standard of earnestness, devotion, and faithfulness. Christ complained first, then, of their lukewarmness, or their tepidity in the spiritual life. The tepid spiritual condition of a professed individual Christian, or a company of Christians, is utterly abhorrent to Christ. He would rather have the Church frozen than lukewarm; He would rather have the Church boiling than lukewarm. He said, "I would that thou wert frozen; I would that thou wert boiling!" The reasons for this are plain. Something may be made out of the cold, and there is something of eternal worth in being hot, but to be neither one nor the other is sickening. If the warmth only amounts to lukewarmness, nothing in the world can be made of it; and those who are in that spiritual state, and have habituated themselves to rest in it, are worse off than those who have never been

reached by Divine Grace. To be religious, or professedly Christian, without the operating life of the Holy Spirit, is a most terrible state to be in, a state that is worse than that of pronounced unbelief. Such a spiritual condition was a great offense to the Lord, and hence He said, "I will spue thee out of my mouth." To be spued out of the mouth is to be cast aside forever as utterly useless and disgusting.

Then Christ complained of their spiritual tepidity, their lukewarmness. That was their *actual* condition. There was also their *conscious* condition or what they thought and believed concerning themselves. They doubtless did not think they were at fault in their spiritual life. They said, each and all, "I am rich, and increased with goods." They claimed to be wealthy, and to be increasing in their wealth. This was a declaration of self-satisfaction. To be rich, is to be in possession of much worldly goods. Laodicea was a rich city, having the most famous wool market in the world. Many of the products of the East there exchanged hands for distribution in the West, leaving rich profits for the merchants and manufacturers. There are reasons for believing that the church in that city was the wealthiest of any in existence at that time. When the spiritual life is low, or does not exist at all, where there is great wealth, there is apt to be great self-confidence and pride. The rich are bold to think themselves well-

provided for against the day of evil. There is a great power in worldly wealth, and a church made up of wealthy members is easily persuaded that it has everything necessary for all purposes in this life and the next. There is a great danger, too, in mistaking the possession of material wealth for the power of the Holy Spirit. When an individual or church is satisfied with material wealth, it is difficult to get them to see the importance of possessing and enjoying the riches of grace which are in Christ Jesus. The people in Laodicea who professed to be Christians were self-deceived by their self-satisfaction. They said, "I have need of nothing," when in fact, they were in dire need of all things that Christ had to give. It is therefore no surprise that Christ complains of their tepid spiritual state.

But in this complaint, the Lord tells the church how He sees them. Some one has said that in every man there are three men; the man he *is*, the man he *thinks* himself to be, and the man that *others* see him to be. We could say also that in every church there are three churches, the church that is, the church it thinks itself to be, and the church that Christ sees it to be. The church that Christ sees is the church in its real condition, and its real attitude toward Him. We ought to give very earnest heed to what Christ says to this church. First, He said to them, "Thou art *wretched*," the primary meaning of that word be-

ing, "oppressed," or "weighed down" as with a heavy burden. The church members in Laodicea were burdened and they did not know it, and hence they were "wretched." What was their burden? We are not told. Their burden may have been the round of daily duty, or social functions. It may have been their business or profession, or it may have been constituted by their religious activities. One claims that their burden was their material wealth. If this be so, then they were carrying that which they believed was carrying them. If this be true, then we have a church in this letter, not burdened with debt, but rather burdened with wealth.

Again in the eyes of the Lord, the condition of this church is described as "*miserable*." Like the word "wretched," this word is used in one other place in the Bible (1 Cor. 15:19) where the apostle says, "If in this life only, we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most *miserable*." The word "miserable" has the meaning of "pitiable." To be pitiable is to be an object which excites in the breast of the observer pain or sorrow. The Saviour had no word of praise for this church. His feeling and attitude toward this church was one of real pain and sorrow.

He also said, "Thou art *poor*." To be poor in the sense of the word here is to be in a state of cringing beggary, as a pauper by the roadside. The word denotes absolute, public mendicancy. Any one poor according to this significant word is

in straitened circumstances of the most horrible kind. This church saw herself, and believed herself rich and increasing with goods. But Christ saw her absolutely void of those riches which are riches indeed. She was a distressed mendicant on the roadside, cringing and begging for alms. What a picture of a church!

In the eye of Christ, not only was this church oppressed, pitiable, and poor, but she was blind as well. "Thou art *blind*." This is the only place the word "blind" is used in the Revelation. It does not denote total or stone blindness, but rather opaqueness, or dimness, as if trying to look through a cloud of smoke. This word may be employed to describe physical or mental indistinctness of vision, and doubtless it was in the latter sense used in this passage. They evidently lacked light, and sight, and so could not see things far or near, clearly. Mentally, they were cribbed, cabined, and confined, and so were limited in activities, knowledge, and experience.

Furthermore, Christ saw this church naked. "Thou art *naked*." This word is used twice more in the Revelation (16: 15; 17: 16), and means to be nude, to be stripped of all covering, either literally, or figuratively. The word as used by our Lord here is employed in a symbolic sense, and signifies "open to view," not concealed, manifest, defenseless, unprovided for, and destitute. To some of the other churches, or to some of the individuals or

groups in the other churches, Jesus spoke of being clothed in white garments, which symbolize the righteous acts of the saints. This church had no such garments in God's sight, and hence her shame before the presence of Jehovah.

Thus we see how Christ complained of certain defects in five of these churches. He found fault with their declension of love, worldly patronage, autocracy, secularism, formalism, self-satisfaction, independence, and spiritual wretchedness, beggary, blindness, and nakedness. As Christ looks into the Church to-day, as she appears on the field of history, does He see these defects and others within her life? Is the Church altogether pleasing Christ to-day, or is the Church partially, at least, displeasing to Him? Each of us ought to put ourselves under the careful judgment of these letters to see whether our Lord would say, "I have somewhat against thee." By His Grace, and out of love for Him, may we seek to correct our defects as individuals, as groups, and as churches, that in all things we might be well-pleasing in His sight.

IV

THEIR COUNSELS

(*Revelation 2-3.*)

WE have searched these Letters for the description of their Author, for the words of praise that He has for them, and for the complaints that He makes against them. Now, we will go through the letters again, and search for the words of advice He offers them. He does not only commend and praise, but He gives wise, tender counsel as well.

I

The first word of Counsel is to the church in Ephesus (2: 5), and reads, "Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly and will remove thy candlestick out of its place, except thou repent." In this counsel, there are two things, a definite word of command, and a solemn warning used for the purpose of enforcing prompt obedience to that command. In the command, they are told to do several things: Remember, Repent, Reform, and give earnest attention. They are first requested to go back and think of the freshness and the power of their first love. He

would say, "Remind your hearts of the light that never was on sea or land when you began to love Him." "Remember!" Oh, the tenderness of that word of Christ. They had fallen from a high altitude. They were once on the mountain top of Christian life, experience, and service, and now they are in the valley. They were on the dead level of orthodoxy. This is exactly where much of the Church is to-day, and the Lord would have her "Remember."

But they are also commanded to Repent; that is, to turn back in heart and purpose to the old attitude, the attitude of simplicity and purity, the abandonment of everything for love, the first love that leaves father and mother, houses and lands, and everything for Christ's sake. They are to go back to that and to return to their first works. What are the first works? Jesus explains them to us elsewhere, for He said, "This is the work of God that ye believe on him whom he hath sent." The loss of love toward Christ is an evidence of the loss of faith in Christ. These people had not believed on Christ as they once did, or they would have loved Him as of old. They had lost their love, because they had first lost their faith. Simplicity of confidence always brings forth the fruit of perfect love. If the fruit of love is smitten, it is because the root of love is diseased.

But I said that there was a solemn warning in this word of counsel: "Else I will come unto thee

quickly and will remove thy candlestick out of his place." The candlestick was the church in Ephesus, organized, and functioning as an assembly of the people of God. Yes, notwithstanding all the perfection of their work, labour, and patience, and notwithstanding their cold purity, formal orthodoxy, and the fact that they once did love, that lampstand must be removed. It is impossible to witness for Christ in the coldness and darkness of the world, except in the power and warmth of first love. Unless there be first love, the light is to go out, and the lampstand must be removed. This is a solemn warning. Loss of first love to Christ will issue in loss of love to the brethren, and cannot fail to dry up the rivers of compassion which flow out to the lost world. It is the first love of the saint that is the true light that shines in the dark place. Love is the distinctive dress of God's family, the first lesson of God's school, and the fundamental law of Christ's kingdom. Without first love, we may retain ceaseless activity in religious service, but there will be no light shining in a dark place. This is what the Master refers to here, when He says, "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith." Be solemnly warned, be counselled, be advised, give attention to these things, and then act accordingly, or the lampstand will be removed, except ye remember, repent and reform. The church in Ephesus did not remember, repent, and reform, and the lampstand was

removed, for the church in that city ceased to exist, and forever lost her testimony to the nations round about. This solemn warning is for the Church to-day, and for every individual member of it, as it was for the church in Ephesus long ago.

II

The Counsel given to the church in Smyrna is of a different character. The word of advice from our Lord in these letters is always suited to the particular condition. It must be borne in mind that the church in Smyrna was suffering great tribulation. He comes to that church with the reassuring words (2: 10; 2: 11 a), "Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days. Be thou faithful unto death. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches." As we noticed before, there is no word of complaint in this letter. His word of counsel to this suffering people is very distinct, and has three parts; first, Fear not; second, Be thou faithful unto death, and third, He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches. There is no promise that they should escape future suffering. They had suffered much, they were suffering at the time that this letter came to them from heaven, and they are told that they will suffer more in the future. He tells them that

heavier trials are to come upon them, and the "Fear not" is a preparatory word in advance of the present consciousness of need. He does not say, "Fear not the things that thou hast suffered," but "Fear not the things which thou art *about* to suffer." He tells them not to be afraid, and gives them no promise of help. He does not say, "Never mind, these things will soon be over." He comes with another announcement of greater sorrow. He wants them to understand that He knew experimentally the sorrows they had in the past, the sorrows that they were at the time passing through, and what their sorrows would be in the future. There is a great comfort in knowing that Christ is acquainted with the things that are yet to be, and that in facing them He says, "Do not be afraid." There is no sorrow, no trial awaiting the Church or the individual child of God that Jesus is not thoroughly acquainted with. He knew what was hidden deep in the future. He knew at that time that the devil was about to cast some of them into prison that they might be tried, but He said, "Fear none of these things, for the persecution will increase, the darkness will deepen, the tribulation become more severe, and the pressure more oppressing." He tells them that they were going to be cast into prison, and there be tried. The prison was a prelude to execution. Then He also tells them that their tribulation would last "ten days." This does not mean liter-

ally ten days, but a period of time, on the human side, of an indefinite duration, which would be sharp, and ultimately come to an end. With the Church of God generally, and with the national people of God, the Jews, these "ten days" have lasted now for two thousand years. During this time in the Church's history, she has been in prison, put in bondage, darkness, sorrow, and to death. The comforting thought is, whatever the sufferings of the people of God are, the Saviour knows them, and will be with His people in the midst of them, and so He says to the suffering ones, "Fear not."

In view of these coming trials, Jesus said to them, "Be thou faithful unto death." The word "faithful" here is from a root which means to be convinced. Faithfulness is loyalty to the contract, to the agreement. It always grows out of intelligent conviction. The faithfulness of the people of God toward Christ is the assurance and foundation of the faithfulness of Jesus Christ toward them. A deep conviction of Christ's faithfulness toward the compact produces in them faithfulness toward the compact. It is as though Christ has said to them, "You are going to be cast into prison, that you may be tried." "Be faithful," that is, keep right on believing and obeying. Do not question Me; do not doubt Me; depend fully upon Me. The Lord did not mean, gather yourselves up and square your shoulders, and then go through. He simply meant, Trust Me. Let Me be your courage

and your strength. I have been through it all. I passed through the event of death, and remained for seventy-two hours in the state of death, but I am alive forevermore. I have gone to the limit of the matter. There is no depth of sorrow and of trial that I have not fathomed. There is no darkness that I have not penetrated. "Be faithful," even though it means death to you, because your death will only mean your entrance upon a larger and fuller life in fellowship with Me in glory.

The third part of this Counsel is a call to earnest and concentrated attention. "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches." A hearing ear is a symbol of an understanding mind and heart. Paul exhorted the Ephesian Christians in this manner (Eph. 5: 17), "Wherefore be not unwise, but *understanding* what the will of the Lord is." To hear the will of the Lord is to intelligently understand the will of the Lord. Faith in Christ, and obedience to Christ, constitute the hearing of the soul. They are commanded, therefore, to listen with all readiness, attention, and honesty, and to be willing to obey whenever He speaks. This appeal indicates that what is written in these letters is spoken by the Holy Spirit. Then, it also implies that there are those who have not the ear to understand the message spoken by Divine Grace. The man, born of nature only, cannot understand the things of the Spirit of God, for they are sheer folly unto him, and neither can he know

them because they are spiritually perceived. The fact that this call to attention is found in all of these letters, tells us that the message that concerns one church, concerns every church in every place and age. We can never employ our faculty of hearing better than in hearkening attentively, and obeying practically, the Word of the Living God. We deserve to lose this faculty if we do not use it for this purpose. Those who will not hear this call of God now will wish at length that they had never had a capacity for hearing anything at all. The particular message referred to in this letter is the blessed and tender announcement that Christ knows thoroughly the sufferings and the sorrows that are coming in the future of the Church's life. This announcement is not only for the Church generally, but for groups, and for individuals in the Church.

III

To the church in Pergamos, there is a word of solemn Counsel (2: 16, 17b), which reads, "Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches." When He counselled the church in Ephesus, He advised them to do three things; to Remember, to Repent, and to Reform. When He counselled the church in Smyrna, He exhorted them to fear not, and to be faithful even

unto death. But to the church in Pergamos, He simply says, "Repent," that is, change your mind, your attitude, your conduct, your policy, your method of procedure. This is not a command to repent toward God, or toward Christ, so much as it is an order to repent toward the Balaamites, and the Nicolaitanes, whom they were harbouring in the Church. Evidently, the better element in the church of Pergamos, in their attitude and conduct toward these false teachers, were going on the principle that it is better to let the sleeping dog lie. They were afraid of trouble, and so they were consenting to the presence and the teaching of Balaamism, and Nicolaitanism in the Church. We have much of this in our churches to-day.

In one of the churches which I had the pleasure of serving, a few months after I arrived to take up the work, a woman, a member of the church, came to me one day to make a confession. I would not hear her confession alone, and so despatched a messenger to bring some of the deacons. She made her confession before the deacons and myself, and it was vile in the extreme. She was a sinful woman, though enrolled as a member in that church. When she made her confession, she involved seventeen others in the church. The only thing to do under the circumstances was to expel that woman from church membership, and all the others who were involved with her. The church, or a large number in it, knew about the guilt of

these parties, or had some suspicions about them, but they were afraid to do anything, or say anything about it, the reason being that they were fearful of trouble. God began to work in that church with the result that the faithful ones were called upon to repent toward those evil characters. On a Wednesday evening, all of those persons were publicly expelled for sins of immorality. Was there trouble? Yes, much, but the church was purified. The Spirit of God came down upon that church, and many in that city were led to confess Christ through that church. The following Sunday evening, forty-four came forward, and took their stand for Christ and His cause. Those evil characters were Balaamites and Nicolaitanes.

In another church of which I had the honour of being pastor, I learned that one of the teachers of one of the best classes in the Sunday school was a Christian Science woman, who was aspiring to be a "Reader" in the Christian Science church in that city. Her name was on the roll of that Baptist church, and she was considered a member in good and regular standing. The friends and relations of that young woman were also members of that church. When I learned of it, I conferred with some of the teachers and officers of the Sunday school, together with the deacons, and they knew about it, but said that she would do no harm, and that if anything were done to remove her from the class, it would certainly cause serious trouble

within the assembly. To save trouble, their policy had been to allow her to pursue her course, and to teach as she wished. She was teaching Christian Science to the class in a Baptist Sunday school! I went to her and asked if it were true that she was a Christian Scientist, and she answered unhesitatingly in the affirmative. I told her as kindly as possible that she must desist, and leave that class, which she did forthwith. Was there trouble? Yes, much. Not only was that young woman asked to leave the class, but her name was erased from the roll, and she was publicly expelled from the membership. Though this was a very unpleasant experience, it resulted in a most blessed experience for that young woman, for through it, she was delivered from Christian Science, became truly converted to Christ, and was restored into fellowship in that church.

Now, allowing those evil characters to remain members in the first church I have mentioned, and allowing that young woman to teach the errors of Christian Science to a Sunday-school class in a Baptist church, was something like the people were doing in Pergamos. They were giving immorality and erroneous teaching a place in their church life and doctrine, and the Saviour said He hated it, and what He hated then, He hates to-day, and so He calls upon all in the churches who are faithful to Him and to His Word to repent, or to change their attitude and policy toward such characters.

Not only is there a distinct command in this word of Counsel, but there is a very solemn warning as well. The warning is given to enforce prompt obedience to the command issued. He said, "Repent: or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them (not against thee) with the sword of my mouth." This letter contains the most solemn warning of all. From it, we learn that the Church was evidently very lax in disciplining unworthy members. Certain ones were holding and teaching erroneous doctrines, and were allowed to remain at ease as members of that church. For such people to remain as members in good and regular standing in a Christian church is most harmful both to the church and to themselves. There are people who are members of the Church to-day to whom we are doing a great wrong, by allowing them to remain there. They imagine themselves to be in the place of life, when in fact, they are in the place of death. For their own safety these people ought to be expelled from the church, and their names erased from the roll, and hence the Saviour would say to those who are truly saved in the Church, "If you do not repent, change your mind, and take up a different attitude and policy toward these false teachers, I will come to thee quickly in judgment by the sword of my truth. I will fight against them, and rout them from their places of habitation in the assembly." This is a threat of judgment swift and terrible

with the end in view of purging the assembly of the saints. This is what the whole Church of God requires to-day, and when this is accomplished, the Church herself will be made new, and the Balaamites and Nicolaitanes within her borders will find their place, and go out.

It is always a fact that the sins and failings of unfaithful members in a church implicate every person in the assembly. It is true that judgments come by reason of the wicked only, but when they come, the good have to suffer with the bad. As things are around us, both the gold and the dross are cast alike into the fire, though only the dross is consumed, while the gold is purified. When there is blessing on account of the good, the sinful share it; when there is judgment on account of the sinful, the saints are made to feel it with the rest. It is not right that the good should escape the judgment entirely, especially if they did not put forth honest efforts to remove the cause of it. The real cause of the judgment threatened in this letter was the laxity of the good in disciplining the bad within the Church. It is wisdom upon our part to-day to take our Lord's solemn warning in this case for ourselves.

IV

The word of Counsel to the church in Thyatira is the next in order, and though brief, it is not the less significant (2: 25). "But that which ye have

already, hold fast till I come." Seemingly, this word of counsel is not addressed to the whole Church but rather to a company within the Church described as "the rest." In this word of counsel, there are several things. First, a Command, which is "hold fast till I come." They had faith in Christ, and that they were to hold fast. They had gained ground in the Christian life and against their enemy, and that they were to hold fast. They had made for themselves a reputation for soundness of teaching, and that, too, they were to hold fast. They had the word of God, and the ordinances of the Gospel, and these were very great things to have. There is nothing on earth that can compensate for the loss of these things. To hold all of these things fast, and not to let our faith in them, and love for them slip, constitute our highest privilege and our Christian duty. Hence the command, "Hold fast till I come."

But in this word of Counsel, they are advised to carry on the conflict against false teaching and sin unto final victory. Christian life is an eternal war with the evil that is in us, with the sins that upset us, with the false teaching that abounds about us, and with the ills and trials of this life. The devil is all the time and in all places active in all of these things, and we are in constant danger of losing ground that we have won, and hence the command, "to hold fast till I come." Heavy as the battle may be, we must press on to victory; we

are not to think even once of giving up the fight, for it is only to those who fight unto victory that the promise is made of a sure reward.

Furthermore, in this brief word of Counsel, the "rest" are commanded to keep Christ's works unto the end. Christ's works are the true works, placed over against the false works of the false teachers. The works of the false teachers were works of the flesh, performed by the efforts of the self-life. They are always, though perhaps religious, of the devil. Christ's works are the works of the Holy Spirit accomplished through those who believe. They are works accomplished as the result of faith in Christ and sincere devotion to Christ. They are works of love, of purity, of chastity, and true service for mankind. No mere works, however good, can save us, but built on Christ as a foundation, and issuing from Him as the source through us by the Holy Spirit, are truly His works, and will be accepted and rewarded as such. All the honours promised to these people were conditioned upon their keeping of Christ's works, and their faithful continuance in them unto final victory. These things constitute on earth the heavenly calling of God's people. All of that which we have in Christ by faith, we must hold fast, against all enemies, till He comes, bringing His reward with Him. The counsel to the "rest" in Thyatira is the advice Christ gives to every faithful believer to-day.

V

Now we come to the Counsel given to the church in Sardis. Plainly, that Counsel has a command and a warning, which enforces obedience to the command (3: 2, 3): "Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die: . . . remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast and repent . . . He that hath an ear let him hear what the Spirit sayeth unto the churches." In this word of command, there are several things which were not mentioned in the previous words of counsel. First of all, Christ calls upon them to become wakeful, to stir themselves up to watchfulness. "Be watchful!" The significance of this word is the same as that given by Paul to the Ephesians, where he says (Eph. 5: 14), "Awake thou that sleepest and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light." To be watchful is to be alert, sensible, active, and safe. It would appear from these words that the people in Sardis had rocked themselves to sleep in their Christian service. They had become self-satisfied. The sleep into which they had fallen, if they continued in it, meant death, and so it was necessary that they should be aroused from it. They are commanded, therefore, to arouse themselves to more vigour and more earnestness. They were in great danger but were not aware of it. They had become inert and drowsy in religious

duty, and had little or no consciousness of their real situation. They were therefore called upon to quicken themselves and to arouse their flagging energies. They are to trim their lamps afresh and go forth anew to greet the coming Bridegroom, and hence, the order, "Be watchful."

Furthermore, they are commanded to strengthen the things that remain. "Strengthen the things which remain that are ready to die." There were some things in this church that were already dead, and they needed a resurrection into life again. There were other things in this church that were going on to death and might die at any moment. Death stands for insensibility, inactivity, danger, and decay. The things that were ready to die doubtless were the externals of the Christian life. They had an outward profession of faith, and it was ready to die. They had some good works left, but they were being carried on with the spirit of indifference, and with little devotion of heart. They needed a real revival of spiritual life, and to this they were commanded to address their attention and efforts. They had the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper left, and they were called upon to strengthen them by possessing and experiencing all of that which they symbolized. The organization of the church remained, and they were to strengthen that by allowing the flood-tide of the water of life to flow in, and to fill every part. What these people really needed was a fresh

and repeated infilling of the Holy Spirit. There were many lame Christians among them, and they needed to be strengthened in their feeble knees. There were many backsliders among them, and they needed to be reclaimed, to take hold afresh and to set out again with new vigour.

Not only are the Christians in this church called upon to be watchful and to strengthen the things that remain, but they are also commanded to recur to their old experience. "Remember therefore, how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast and repent." The Christians in Ephesus were called upon to remember from whence they had fallen. These people at the beginning received and heard the Gospel message by faith. When they first received and heard the Gospel message, they held fast to it by a mighty grip of faith in Christ. When they first repented toward God, they did so by turning in faith to God's Son, who is exalted at the right hand of the Father to give repentance. These people evidently had forgotten how they first received, heard, and repented. Now they are called upon to go back to their original experience and begin over again at the point where they left off. At the beginning of their Christian life, they grasped the Gospel message with real devotion of heart and purpose, and now they are to grasp it again as they did at the first. These words of Jesus are always in place for every Christian and for every church, calling upon us to remember how

we received and heard at the first, and how we for a considerable period held fast and gained the victory in Him. It is good for us to go back again and again to that hour, to that place when we passed out of death into life, and out of condemnation into justification. It is no surprise to us that the Saviour here addressed each member of the church, as He did each member of every other church in this group, with the words, "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches."

VI

The word of Counsel addressed to the church in Philadelphia is brief (3:11): "Behold I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown." It contains three things, A Sublime Promise, A Distinct Command, and A Compelling Argument. The promise is, "I come quickly." To the church of brotherly love, this was a cheering promise; to the church in Sardis, it was a solemn promise of warning. What Christ did for the church in Philadelphia, He has done for the Church over and over again. He calls attention to His coming as the time of crisis and victory. There is no ultimate triumph for the Church on this side of the glorious Second Advent. But the promise is, "I come *quickly*." Six different times in this book, the word "quickly" is used in reference to the Second Coming, and sig-

nifies shortly, suddenly, silently, and with surprise and without delay (2: 5, 16; 3: 9; 22: 7, 12, 20). This is surely a promise of the personal, imminent coming of Christ a second time. In view of this promise, the Counsel is, "Hold that fast which thou hast." What did this church have? Several things are specified in the letter. They had a little strength, His Word, His glorious name, and the promise of His return. Yes, and they had also an open door of opportunity, and the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper. All of these things they were to hold fast.

The command to hold fast is enforced by a suggested argument, "That no man take thy crown." The crown referred to was not salvation, but rather reward for service faithfully accomplished. The Second Coming will be the time of the crowning. Before and up to that event, is the suffering, the service, the conflict, and the holding fast. The crown is sure to every child of God, if he will but aim for it, continue in service as he began, and hold fast to the end. Falsities and all kinds of sin may be thick around us, but we must hold fast, looking for and hasting the coming of that day when deliverance and glorious triumph shall be ours. Some may hold us in disrepute because of our doctrine and our hope, but the Risen Lord bids us to hold fast, and pledges to us support and protection during the days of our faithfulness. In this life, there is an open door for every Christian;

in the glory that is dawning, there is a crown unfading.

Let us remember that it is possible for the child of God, and servant of Christ, to lose the crown of reward at the end. The crown of reward is promised to all, but only certain select ones will obtain it. Each separate disciple has a distinctive vocation, and in the plan of God, a specific and sure prize connects itself with the faithful fulfillment of that vocation. The fact that the crown lost by one passes to another, brings to mind the faithfulness of God, and the wonderful variety and largeness of His purposes. So gracious are the Divine purposes that there can be no diminution in their scope. The Lord will never take back what He has resolved to give for the blessing of His people. The failure of the individual child of God to win the reward, does not imply the failure of God to bestow what He promised. If one does not receive the crown, another will be raised up in his place to receive it. The words "that no man take thy crown" have both an individual and a collective application. Many incidents of Scripture illustrate and enforce these words. Great in character and in office as was Moses, he failed to attain all the glory it was God's will to put upon him. What was true in the history of Moses, became true also in the history of David. Let us each take solemn heed to the fact that the crown that was meant for us may pass from us to more

royal souls. The word of counsel in this letter "Behold I come quickly; hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown," is addressed to every child of God, in every place, and under all circumstances.

VII

Thus we come to the final word of Counsel contained in these letters from heaven. It is addressed to the church in Laodicea, and is in perfect keeping with the condition as Christ sees it (3: 18, 19). "I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent." In this tender word of counsel, there are three things: An Order, A Declaration, and An Appeal. The order is, "Buy of me." The word "buy" here is a pictorial one which presents to the mind a vision of a large open space, as of a market, where trade is carried on. The primary idea is not that of redemption or of purchase. The members of this church were accustomed to buying from the people of the East, and selling to the people of the West at a vast profit. They knew exactly what it meant to trade with other people, for the purpose of material gain. Now what Christ wanted them to do was, to trade

with Him, not for the articles He had to sell at a price, but for the articles He had to give without money and without price. He advised them to trade with Him for three things, gold that had been refined in the fire, which is Truth without error, that they might become truly rich in the riches which are riches indeed. He also advised them to trade with Him for white raiment which would array them for the society of heaven. We read many times in this book of fine linen, white and clean, which is the righteousness of the saints; of robes made white in the blood of the Lamb, and of garments unspotted by the flesh. Elsewhere we read of the garments of salvation. White garments speak of purity, victory, and honour, and this is the raiment that Jesus proposed that these people should buy of Him. Furthermore, He advises them to anoint their eyes with the eyesalve that they might see. Some of these people were large dealers in ointments, perfumeries, and medicines brought from various places noted for their production, and highly valued for their healing powers. But such ointments and oils as they handled could not heal their spiritual ailments. Among them all, there was no eyesalve that could cure their defective vision, or recover them to right views of their real condition as Christ beheld it. These people were blind and could not see properly, and hence they were in need of an effective eyesalve which Jesus, the Spiritual Occulist,

proposed to furnish. Indeed, Christ came into the earth for this very purpose, to open blind eyes, and to remedy the obscure vision of the children of men. Christ is the only One who can bestow the Unction of the Holy Spirit, which Unction always gives the power to perceive the Truth correctly, and to teach the Truth plainly. Hence, the people in Laodicea are counselled to trade with Christ for the purified Gold of Truth, which is Himself; for the white garments of purity of Christian character, which is also Christ Himself, that the shame of their moral nakedness might not be made manifest. They are also counselled to trade with Him for eyesalve which would give them spiritual vision, that they might see clearly and correctly. The advice given to the church in Laodicea is the advice for every church and for every individual Christian to-day.

But in this word of Counsel there is also a word of declaration; "as many as I love I rebuke and chasten." Christ loved this church in spite of its lukewarmness, self-satisfaction, independence, wretchedness, spiritual poverty, and intellectual blindness. He had commended His love to this church in that He had given Himself in sacrifice for her, in order that He might present her unto Himself, not having spot, nor wrinkle, nor any such thing. Had Christ not loved this church, He would certainly have given her up to eternal ruin. But because He did love her, He could not give her

up, and hence His tender counsel, and His steadfast patience with her.

Now He says, "As many as I love I rebuke and chasten." This sounds a little strange and paradoxical to natural expectation. We would rather suppose that those whom Christ loved, He would make rich and noble, but the Saviour speaks differently. He here gives it as the settled principle of His will, that those whose lives are flowing on amid sunshine and flowers have the most reason to doubt their favourable standing with Him, for as many as He loves, He rebukes and chastens. The builder does not touch the stones which he has not chosen for place in his edifice. He deals only with those which He most approves and has selected for the most honoured places, and these He hews and chisels, and rasps, and shapes for their positions. Christ has many flowers in His garden, and sometimes it is necessary for Him to put them in the shade in order to make them grow the faster.

To rebuke is to reprove, to convict, to shame, to force to a conclusion. To chasten is to teach and educate by means of the rod, to correct with severity, to punish for the remedy of wrong, to set right by whipping as in the case of a parent dealing with the child. In rebuke, we see Christ the Judge; in chastening, we see Christ the Parent. These two treatments run together and set forth most severe disciplinary treatment, meant to suppress and remove faults, and bring about a better

condition. These two words designate a painful and humiliating treatment, not to destroy, but to educate, correct, develop, improve, and fashion in all manner of goodness. So the Saviour says He deals with those whom He truly loves. This has been the history of the Church from the beginning until now, and so it shall be until the end. "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten."

In view of the fact that Christ rebukes and chastens all whom He loves, He issues a twofold appeal, or a call for two things. "Be zealous therefore and repent." It is a call for zeal and repentance. Zeal means fire, heat, boiling fervency, a holy warmth of all the inner powers in relation to Christ and His service. Zeal is like wings to a bird, like sails to a ship, and like the fire on which the engine depends for its power. Under the law, no sacrifice could be offered without fire, and so under the Gospel, no service can be rendered unto God without zeal. There must be warmth of soul, or all our devotions fail to rise acceptably to heaven. Zeal in service for Christ is not mere excitement and rant; it is not fanaticism, bigotry, and intolerance; it is not a proud conceit of superiority which thanks God that it is not as other men; it is not the heat of blustering passion which must have the flames, like the salamander, in which to live, and leaves only a burnt and blackened district when it returns. True zeal for Christ is the giving of the whole heart, will, in-

telleet, and strength to Jesus and His service, so as not to be drawn aside by the lure of the world or to stop at any sacrifice the Risen Lord may require of us. "Be *zealous* therefore."

Finally they are called upon to *Repent*. "Be *zealous* therefore, and *repent*." Six times reference is made to repentance in these letters (2: 5, 16, 21, 22; 3: 19). Smyrna, the suffering church, and Philadelphia the church of brotherly love, are not called upon to repent. They had no defects, and therefore no complaints were made against them. Like four of the other churches, this one is called upon to Repent, that is, to change their mind, their attitude, their relation, and their conduct. Their whole estimate of themselves has to be revolutionized. Their good opinion had to be dropped. They were to right about turn and advance in the opposite direction. They were to go back to where they left off, and begin all over again. They are to seek a fresh infilling of the Holy Spirit, and to become alive again, and zealous, as doubtless they once were in their profession and duties as Christians. If they did not give themselves to more heart earnestness in Christian service, all of their boasted outward prosperity would be their final ruin. Nothing but a new start in a warm, devoted, and zealous spirituality in all their duties and work for Christ would satisfy His heart. Hence, the appeal, "Be *zealous* therefore, and *repent*." This is the clarion call of the Christ to the whole Church to-day.

V

THEIR PROMISES

(Revelation 2-3.)

WE have gone through these letters looking at the various descriptions that the Author of them gives of Himself. We have also gone through the letters looking at the Commendations He had for the most of these churches, and then we have noticed the Complaints He made against these churches, or many members in the churches. But it was not sufficient for the Author to commend the churches and to complain of certain defects that He saw in the churches. He wanted to correct the defects, and so He offered them certain advice, which, if they followed, would bring them in all things approval in His sight. We will now go through these letters again, and look for the Promises He made to those who would overcome, or would obey the advice presented.

I

The first Promise is made to the church in Ephesus (2: 7): "To him that overcometh, will

I give to eat of the Tree of Life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God." To the Ephesian Christians then the promise is, if they overcome, they shall eat of the Tree of Life which is in the garden of God. Many in the Ephesian church had fallen from their original high level of enthusiasm, and they needed to be quickened, and reinvigorated, and the promise is made to suit their need. The fruit of the tree of life is here presented as the infallible cure for their disease. The expression is symbolical, like practically everything else in the book, and its meaning may be clearly specified. It is a Jewish symbol of life. The tree was a symbol of life-giving Divine power both to the Asian Greeks and to the Palestinian Jews, though in different ways. Trees had been worshipped by the Asian Greeks as the home of the Divine nature, and Divine power from time immemorial, and were still so worshipped in Asia Minor when the revelation was given. On some sacred tree, the prosperity and safety of a family, a tribe, or a city, or even an individual was believed to depend. When the sacred olive tree on the Acropolis of Athens put forth a new shoot, after the city had been burned by the Persians, the people concluded that the safety of the State was assured. The belief was widely circulated that the life of a man was connected with some tree, and returned into that tree when he died. A tree which grew on a grave was believed to be penetrated with the spirit

and life of the buried man. There was an old Athenian law which punished with death any one that had cut a holm-oak growing in a burial ground. It was claimed that in a holy tree, the Divine life brought itself close to man.

This doubtless is an illustration, not only taken from the garden of Eden, but also from Pagan thought, and used to set forth a great spiritual truth. To eat of the Tree of Life is to feed upon the Divine Nature and power. In this symbol, Christ Himself is represented as the Tree of Life, for in Him is the home of the fullness of the Godhead in a bodily form. He is the Tree of Life in the midst of the garden of God. The promise here made to the overcomer is the pledge of a full enjoyment of the nature and the power of God as residing in Jesus Christ. This will restore the first love, and cause us again to begin the first works. We can only feed upon the fruit of the Tree of Life on the condition that we overcome. Our overcoming the world, the flesh and the devil, is already an accomplished fact in Christ. We are not to achieve a victory so much as to celebrate a victory. When we enter in and celebrate the victory, giving Him the glory for the same, we eat of the Tree of Life which is now above in the Paradise of God.

II

The Promise made to the suffering church in

Smyrna is a double one (2: 10, 11) and reads, "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life." "And he that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death." It might be more truly said that this promise is one, having two aspects, a positive and a negative aspect. The negative aspect is "Shall not be hurt of the second death." The second death is elsewhere spoken of in the book (20: 6, 14; 21: 8). The people of Smyrna will die, that is, pass through the event of death into the other life, but in that other life, there is another death. The persecutors of Smyrna will pass through death to death. The believers of Smyrna being faithful up to the event of physical death, and through the event of physical death, will find no second death beyond, but instead thereof, life abounding. The first death is the death of the body, or the separation of the spiritual from the physical. The second death is a death that follows upon the first death, which is the eternal separation of human personality from God. The second death is unspeakably worse than the first death, both in the dying pangs and agonies of it, and in the duration of it as well. It is spoken of as "eternal death," which means to die, and always be dying. It is painful to all who fall under it, with no promise of ever being relieved from the sorrow and anguish that it entails. The promise here is, "He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death." In no sense, to no degree, and

at no time will the victor experience separation from God, but rather the very opposite, which is eternal fellowship with God.

The other side of the Promise is, "I will give thee a crown of life. The "crown of life" is also spoken of in the Epistle of James (1: 12). There the apostle says, "Blessed is the man that endureth trial, for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life which the Lord hath promised to them that love him." The "crown of life" is promised to all who love the Lord Jesus, but is only given to those of them who endure patiently under trial. The "Crown of Smyrna" was a familiar phrase with the Smyrneans. The phrase arose from the hill Pagos, with the stately public buildings on its rounded top, and spreading out down its rolling sloping sides. In fact, history plainly states that the "Crown of Smyrna" consisted of buildings, and, in the beautiful language of current conversation, buildings were likened to a crown because they stood on a conspicuous place and in an orderly manner. We saw the ruins of many of these old buildings when we visited Smyrna. At a later period of the history of Smyrna, one came there who was a great statesman, and addressing the people, he referred to the citizens of Smyrna as "a crown of glory." The mention of the crown in this letter would carry a special meaning to the church in Smyrna, and would rouse in their hearts many old associations.

The "Crown of Smyrna" had been before their eyes from childhood.

The Promise that Christ made to them was not that of a collection of buildings, nor that of a company of excellent people, but rather a crown of life. This was something new. The earthly Smyrna wore a mural crown like that of her patron Goddess; the true Smyrna, the saved people in that city, suffering as they were at that time, shall wear a crown suited for the saints and the servants of the one living God. In Bible times, several people wore crowns or official head-dresses. The priest wore a crown. The honoured guest at the feast wore a crown, as did the victors in the games, and the kings upon their thrones. The crown speaks of something kingly, of something triumphant. It speaks of reward for victory won, and service accomplished. The soul-winner is promised the incorruptible crown (1 Cor. 9: 25) and the crown of rejoicing in the presence of the Lord at His coming (1 Thess. 2: 19). The faithful under shepherd is promised a crown, which will be given unto him when the Chief Shepherd appears a second time in glory (1 Pet. 5: 4). Further, there is the crown of righteousness that is promised to all those who fight the good fight of faith, who run their course in the Christian life through to the end, who keep the faith, and who love the Lord's appearing. It is the crown of righteousness, because it is given by the righteous One, and because

it is right for all such to possess and wear it. The crown here speaks of reward following on victory. This is what is promised to the suffering, reviled church in Smyrna. It is the pledge of the Victorious Life, not only here, but hereafter.

III

The Promise to the victor in the church of Pergamos is threefold, and, like all the other promises made, is suited to the particular need. It says, "To him that overcometh, will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone, a new name written, which no man knoweth, saving he that receiveth it." Here is a promise of the hidden manna, the white stone, and the new name. Space will not allow of the treatment that should be given to such a wonderful promise. In olden times (Ex. 16: 14-22, 33-36), there was both a revealed and hidden manna, and both were typical of the Christ who was to come. The manna was a heavenly, supernatural food, with which God sustained and nourished His people throughout their wilderness wanderings. That heavenly food was like little white flakes, and fell every morning for the day's supply, except on the Sabbath, to carry them through which a double portion fell on the morning preceding. This bread was divinely provided day by day, and humanly gathered morning by morning.

But I said that this bread was a type of Christ,

the Bread of Life. So the Saviour Himself explained in John 6, where He spoke of Himself as the real manna given of the Father in heaven. He said, "The bread of God is he which cometh down from heaven. If any man eat of this bread, he shall live forever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh which I will give for the life of the world. . . . He that eateth of this bread shall live forever." Christ then is the manna or food of souls, to-day, in their pilgrimage to a better country, as the manna of the wilderness was the food for the bodies of the tribes who were marching to Canaan with banner and song.

But the promise before us speaks of *hidden* manna. What was the hidden manna? When the tabernacle was built, the Divine order was given to take of the daily manna, put it in a golden pot, and lay it up before the Lord in the Ark of the Covenant in the Holy of Holies. Into this sacred place, a symbol of heaven itself, no one but the high priest, and he only once a year, and that with fear and trembling, was permitted to enter. A heavy veil hung between it and the outer sanctuary, which none but he could pass, and beyond which none but he could look. As far as the people generally were concerned, the Holy of Holies was truly a hidden chamber. The specimen of the manna there preserved was hidden in a true and real sense. It was first of all closed in the golden pot, and the pot enclosed in the ark. The ark

was enclosed in the unapproachable Holy of Holies, the Holy of Holies enclosed within the sanctuary, and the sanctuary enclosed within the outer court. That specimen of the heavenly daily food placed in the golden pot was preëminently "the hidden manna."

The omer full of manna that was hidden in the Holy of Holies, unlike that of which the people partook, was *incorruptible*. It continued pure and fresh in the golden pot for generations. The manna which fell in the wilderness, and of which the people ate and were nourished, typified Christ in mortal human flesh; the manna hidden in the Holy of Holies typified Christ in resurrection life, now living and glorified at the Father's right hand. He is now hidden from mortal gaze, death and corruption having no power over Him. The hidden manna here promised is Christ Himself, in the most holy place of the Father's presence. We can truly say then, that the food of the believer exists in two forms, though really one and of the same substance; the corruptible form in which He was given over to death for the life of the world, and the incorruptible form in which He now exists before God in heaven. Christ in immortal, glorified humanity is now hidden from mortal view within the depth of the glory above. Human flesh going on to death cannot enter there, or eye of mortal look upon that Golden Pot of incorruptible food which has thus been laid up in heaven. The

promise of the hidden manna to the victor is a promise of Christ to give Himself in resurrection life here and now to every one who gains the conquest in His name.

There is a second part to this wonderful promise. "I will give him the white stone." What is the significance of the white stone? In olden times, both among the Jews and the Pagans, the white stone was put to several uses. In the first place, there was the white stone of acquittal. When juries voted in olden times, they voted by means of white and black stones; those who believed a man guilty of the crime laid against him dropped a black stone in the urn, and those who believed a man to be innocent dropped a white stone in the urn. The innocent man when discharged by the court was given a white stone to carry about with him to demonstrate his justification before the law. There was also the white stone of admission into all public feasts and games. This was known as the stone of honoured citizenship. It was a kind of complimentary ticket, which admitted to privileges without money and without price. Some think that this is the stone referred to in this promise. If this be true, then the Saviour promises admission to all the joys and pleasures of the eternal kingdom, to the one who prevails in His name. Then, further, there was the stone of victory. Young men contended in the games, and those who won the victory received a white stone while those

who lost in the contest received a red or a black stone. It depended a good deal on the prize that the contestants won, what kind of a stone they would receive. As the Saviour here speaks of a conflict and a victory at the end of the conflict, many think that the stone referred to is the stone of victory. There was still another stone, and perhaps this is the one referred to in our Promise. That was the stone of abiding friendship. If two men met for the first time, and were introduced to each other, and formed a friendly acquaintance, when they parted they exchanged white stones. We do a similar thing to-day when we exchange cards. When these two parties exchanged stones, they pledged to each other, thereby, eternal friendship. Each in his turn, and in every way possible, even though they never met again, helped each other and prayed to the gods for each other. These two stones passed down to the generations following, and perhaps in future years two young men would meet, and each would have on his person a white stone which they received from their ancestors, and it would be discovered that the white stones were the two that had been exchanged years before by the parents of these two men. They would exchange the stones again, and thus swear to each other eternal confidence, protection, and friendship. This meant friendship of a most intimate kind, of a most affectionate nature. I would not be surprised if this were the stone re-

ferred to in this particular promise. This part of the promise therefore would signify that, if we overcome whatever is opposed to Christ and His truth, there will be given to us now and in the future, eternal friendship with Christ of the most intimate and vital kind.

But this does not seem to reach the full meaning of the Promise. I am convinced that the white stone of this passage was not a mere pebble of the stream or the street, but a shining, glittering jewel, which in itself was a sublime treasure. It is not an illustration taken from the pagan world, but rather a symbol taken from the Hebrew kingdom. When the high priest entered the most holy place, he took with him the most lustrous, precious, and sacred jewel of all, which was known as the Urim. It sparkled in the darkness as well as in the light. We can think of nothing but the diamond in this case. This precious gem was given to the priest when he was fully consecrated to office, and through this white, glittering, precious gem, the soul of the priest came into communion with the mind and heart of Jehovah whose name was engraved upon it. The hidden manna spoke of divine nourishment; the white stone spoke of divine illumination, for the proper and full understanding of the deep things of God. This precious white stone then is a gem which speaks of immortal privilege, of divine revelation and insight into the mysteries of God in Christ, which belongs only

unto him that overcomes in the conflict. This is a promise therefore of high priestly communion, in the most holy place, with God in Christ. Nothing can scale the heights or sound the depths of this wonderful promise.

And this is not all, for it is still further added, "I will give unto him . . . a new name written." The new name is engraved on the white stone. On the high priestly Urim, the name of Jehovah was engraved. The name mentioned here is not the name of the victor but rather the name of the Christ who makes the promise. When a new name was given in Bible times, it signified a new character, a new or changed personality which was to be enjoyed by the receiver of the new name. When Christ gives the new name, He gives Himself in the fullness of His purity, power, love, wisdom, grace, and gentleness.

But notice that this new name "No man knoweth saving he that receiveth it." There are certain things that we can only know by possession and experience. The man who never possessed sight and hearing cannot know the joy of those wondrous blessings. Poets from the earliest ages have sung of love, but humans must love in order to know what love means. Every woman has heard about the sweetness and preciousness of maternity, but not until the happy mother holds her infant to her breast does she understand it. Possession alone admits to the experimental knowledge of the

new character and personality that there is for the victor in Christ. The old theologian on this promise said, "Wouldst thou know what manner of new name thou shalt bear? Overcome. It is vain for us to ask beforehand. Hereafter thou shalt see it written on the white stone."

IV

The Promise to the victor in the church of Thyatira follows, and is twofold in character (2: 26-28): "And he that overcometh and keepeth my words unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations; and he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers: even as I received of my Father. And I will give him the morning star." This promise is different from the preceding ones in several important respects. It will be noticed first that the order to give heed to that which the Holy Spirit saith, *precedes* the promise in the first, second, and third letters; here, and in the following letters it *follows* the promise in each case. There must be some significance in this, but what it is, to my mind, is uncertain. Then, the victor in this passage is not only described as an overcomer, but as one "who keepeth my works unto the end." In this letter, we read about "thy" works, "your" works, "her" works, and now "my" works. There are the works of the false professors and the works of the saints of God. Christ's works are

the true works over against the false works, and the wicked works of Jezebel, and those who fall into her snares and destructive teaching. The works of heretics are always the works of the devil—works opposed to Christ and His teaching. Christ's works are supremely works of simplicity, of love, of faith, and of purity. They are works performed, religious or otherwise, having the glory of God in view. The promise is not only to the victor in the conflict, but to the worker in the field.

The first part of this promise is a pledge of sovereign authority. Let us read it again. "He that overcometh and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers: even as I received of my Father." We are reminded in this part of the promise of the second Psalm, where we have a wonderful poetic description of the Messianic Hope, under the symbols of an earthly conquering monarch, and his authority as established throughout the whole world. In this part of the promise there is a reference to "nations," which word delineates races, tribes, families, other than the people of God, whether national or spiritual. At the time that the revelation was given, all "nations" were looked upon as the enemies of God's people. What is given here is a promise of victory over all our enemies, not only in the future, when the Lord comes the second time,

but now in this life of humiliation and suffering. The people of God have always had many enemies both within and without. The enemies at the time of the writing of this letter were moral and spiritual as well as political. But it makes little difference what these enemies are. It is promised unto the victor, and to the one who keeps Christ's works to the end, that he shall dominate these enemies in Christ, as with a rod of iron. Yes, it is ours, as believers, to break all the antagonistic, banded opposition to Christ and His Truth into shivers as a potter's vessel dashed upon the pavement of marble. This victory over the world, or the "nations," Christ Himself won, when He broke the power of death, and came forth from the Hadean world conquering and to conquer.

It should be noted carefully that the sovereign authority here promised by Christ to the victor is in character, and to a degree, the authority which Christ received of the Father. When Christ appeared by appointment to the disciples, somewhere in Galilee, after He rose from the dead, He announced unto them that all authority in heaven and on earth was given unto Him (Matt. 28: 16-18). The authority that belongs to Christ now is here promised to the victor in the conflict, even to the one who keeps His works unto the end. What a promise this is! Who could ever imagine such a thing, that the poor suffering people of God should rise to the dignity of kings and queens over all

their enemies in the earth? With the words of Christ here and also elsewhere, so clear and positive before us, how few believers rise to anything of even a faint conception of this transcendent promise. But they are the words of the now living Lord, and they mean precisely what they say, and they are unmistakably true. This is a promise of sovereign authority for the victor over all of his enemies, not only for the future, but for the present as well, and may all the people of God enter into it and rule their enemies with sovereign sway.

There is another part to this promise, "And I will give him the morning star." What kind of a star is this? What is the morning star? Kings and rulers, prophets and ministers, and the true people of God are spoken of as stars in the Bible. The devil is spoken of as a falling and a fallen star. But this is a peculiar star of preëminent brilliancy and distinction—the star that leads the heavenly host, the star that shines on when all others have faded—the star that heralds the dawning of the morning, and ushers in the day. If we would turn to the end of the book (22: 16), we will find the authoritative statement concerning the identity of this wondrous star. Jesus is there represented as saying, when introducing Himself to John, "I am the bright and morning star." This star, then, is Christ Himself, as the herald and inbringer of the experience and day of glory. Thus

again, Christ promises Himself to the victor—What a promise this is! But it is for every child of God who achieves the glory of victory in the conflict and who keeps Christ's work unto the end.

V

The Promise to the "few" in Sardis who had not defiled their garments, and those who were victors in the battle against sin and wrong, even those who were "worthy," comes fifth in the list and is fraught with the richest of meaning. "And they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy. He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment, and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his Holy Angels." It is difficult to name and number all the blessings specified in this passage. "They shall walk." That is a promise of motion, action, conduct, behaviour, and procedure. The figure of walking always indicates the whole round of daily duty. We read elsewhere about walking in love, in truth, in Christ, and that circumspectly. To the victor here, this is the pledge of action, impulsions, and progress in Christ Jesus. "They shall walk with *me*." This is a promise of companionship with Christ in conduct and life. Noah and Enoch both walked with God, and they were thus well-pleasing unto Him. This speaks of mutual love, confidence, hope, and essential sympathy of nature.

How can two walk together except they be agreed? Walking with Christ here and hereafter speaks surely of continuous progress, growing every moment nearer and nearer the true center of our redeemed souls, and up into the likeness of Him, the Glorified Man. "They shall walk with me *in white*." In this book, we read about white hair, a white stone, white robes, even robes made white in the blood of the Lamb, a white horse, white light, a white cloud, and a white throne. The word "white" in all of these passages does not imply that dead and ghastly white, which is the absence of colour, but the sparkling, flashing, and glistening whiteness like that of the new-fallen snow kissed by the sunbeams. The whiteness referred to here is the dazzling whiteness of the Glory of God. It is something that is living and active, and expressive. This is a promise of unsullied purity with moral and spiritual excellency of character. This alone is for those who keep themselves unspotted from the world, and win in the conflict against all falsities and sin.

But then there is a promise of white garments. "He that overcometh shall be clothed in white garments." White garments in Bible times, when used as a symbol of hidden truth, were very expressive in their significance. They spoke first of purity, of character, and conduct. "Character," some one has said, "is what men are in the dark." Character is David's prayer answered, "Create in

me a clean heart, oh God, and renew a right spirit within me." White robes stand for purity of character which alone Christ can give; but white robes were also the symbols of victory. This was not so only in the Bible, and with the Jews, but also in Greece and Rome as well. In olden times, white was not the colour of the coward, which included submission, but the colour of the conqueror, who had achieved gloriously.

Once more, white robes in ancient times spoke of joy abounding. They did so because they had the colour of light, and there is something joyous and gladsome in the light. We do not speak about the *day* of sorrow; we speak and think about the *night* of sorrow. Light heartens and summons forth the music of the birds, and so there has always been the thought of delightsomeness in the radiance which is the badge of day. But white garments constitute the livery of spiritual and heavenly service. It is the garb that angels wear as they minister before, and from the throne. When Christ here promises the victor garments of white, He pledges to him unsullied purity of character, triumphant conquest of life, abounding festal joy, and complete equipment for heavenly service. "The same shall be clothed in white raiment."

The promise does not end there, for He goes on to say, "I will not blot out his name out of the book of life." "The book of life" is a reference taken from a custom of the ancient peoples, both

Jews and Gentiles, of keeping birth records, and of enrolling citizens for various purposes. God is represented as having a record of all those who are born of Him, and those who are named for special honour and service in His Kingdom. To be blotted out of the book of life was to lose the place of honour and to suffer an untimely natural death, as when Moses prayed that he might be blotted out of God's book, that he might die rather than that Israel should perish (Ex. 32: 32). In the New Testament times, the book of life was the record of the righteous who have now eternal life, and who are named for special honour in the Kingdom of God. When Christ says that He will not blot out the victor's name from the book of life, He means that He will not allow him to suffer an untimely death, and will hold him living and active in spite of the opposition against him. This is a solemn truth which declares again that the authority of life and death is in the hands of our Risen Lord. Christ can enter the name in the book of life, can keep it there against all attempts to expunge it, and He can erase it again. Is your name written on those pages so fair?

Furthermore, He promises, "I will confess his name before my Father and his holy angels." Christ asks that we confess His glorious name and work before men (Matt. 10: 32; Luke 12: 8). It is a part of true discipleship publicly to espouse Christ's name and cause before a gainsaying world,

and not to be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord. In this part of the promise, it is not our confession of Christ before men, but His confession of us before God, and all the high dignitaries of the heavenly world. This part of the promise means that the very Son of God proposes to present the victor's name to the eternal Father as His publicly acknowledged friend, for whom He stands, as a candidate for special honour in the coming kingdom. This is what Christ is doing now in the glory, when men and women keep themselves unspotted from the filth of the world, and achieve gloriously here in the fight.

VI

This leads to the promise made to the victor in the church in Philadelphia (3: 12): "Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and I will write upon him my new name." In this promise, there is the assurance given of being made a steadfast pillar, and when made a pillar, having a threefold inscription. We must notice these separately and endeavour to get at their true significance. The first one contains a promise of being made a pillar in the temple of God. There are two words used in the New Testament for

temple, *hieron*, which describes a sacred place including the entire precincts of the building as the sanctuary in Jerusalem on the summit of Mount Moriah; and *naos*, which means fane, shrine, or inner holy place where it was believed that Deity localized and centralized His manifested Presence. The latter word is employed in this verse, and is used fifteen other times in the book of the Revelation. The word for temple, to describe the complete building of the sanctuary, is not used here at all. Doubtless when the word temple is used in our verse, the reference is to the Holy of Holies, where God's glory dwelt. Now what, or who is the reality of which the inner shrine of the tabernacle and temple was the symbol? Let us bear in mind that we are dealing with a book of symbols here. There is no literal temple in heaven nor on earth to-day. There is no material and perishable building now like the one built by Solomon on Moriah. If we turn over to the end of this book (21: 22), we will find the passage there that will help us to understand the meaning of this reference. In the vision of the New Jerusalem, which is the ideal church of God, John said, "I saw no temple therein." The real temple that he did not see was the *naos*, the most Holy Place, which contained the ark, the law, the golden pot of manna, and the shekinah glory overshadowing all. This was a saddening surprise to John, and yet, after gazing on the vision a little longer, he did see a temple, or

a most holy place, for he immediately added, "The Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple (naos) of it." It is difficult for us to fully appreciate these lofty things, but in some sense, in the true spiritual sense, the Lord God localized His manifested Presence in Christ the Lamb, as the temple of the redeemed. In the ancient Holy of Holies, God and the people met in sweet communion, and in Christ now as the Divine Sacrificial Victim, God and sinful, believing souls meet in vital eternal fellowship. In the Holy of Holies, God disclosed to man His manifested Presence; in Christ, all of God Almighty, in the totality of His attributes, resides, and expresses Himself. Fellowship, worship, oneness, and that hidden in the deep mysteries of the Divine Essence, as dwelling in Christ in resurrection life, are the main ideas here. The temple mentioned in this promise is not a natural building of any kind whatsoever, but Christ Himself, as the possessor and the revealer of God. Into Christ as the real Holy of Holies, the victor is to come as a priest to worship, to drink of the insufferable light, and to share in the fullness of the Divine glory. "The temple of my God" referred to by the Lord is Christ Himself.

But to the victor, the promise is that he shall be made a *pillar* in the temple of my God. The word for pillar, *stulos*, is nowhere else used in Revelation, and it signified a *style*, or post. In the most Holy Place in Jerusalem, there stood several pillars, and

they were placed in the sanctified sanctuary for the purpose of ornament, service, and support. The ceiling, walls, and dome of the whole superstructure depended on the pillars for their support. Without the pillars the temple could not stand. The pillars, therefore, were a necessary part of the superstructure itself and signified strength, support, dignity, and glory. James and John were spoken of as "pillars" (Gal. 2: 9) of the church, and the whole number of the saved are spoken of as "pillars" of the truth (1 Tim. 3: 15). To be pillars of the church, is to be supporters and ornaments of the church; to be pillars of the truth, is to be supporters and ornaments of the truth in word, character, and conduct; to be pillars of the "temple of my God," is to be supporters, defenders, and ornaments of Christ in the matchless glory of His Person, work, and offices. The promise is to every victor, "I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God," that is, a supporter, a defender, and an ornament, of Himself, amidst the world of men, as bye and bye, amidst the myriads of angelic hosts. Then Christ will be admired in those who believe.

Further, it is added, "And he shall go no more out." This is a guarantee of fixedness and abiding stability. In the olden times, the priests served their turn, and then went out from the temple to return again at call, or perhaps never to return at all. There were many priests because they were not allowed to continue in office by reason of in-

firmity, age, disease, and death. But this is not so "in the temple of my God," for like his Lord, the overcomer "continueth ever." In Christ, our Holy of Holies, the temple is eternal. The anthems never cease; the service is never suspended, and the holy communion never ended. "He shall go no more out."

But there is a promise here too of a threefold inscription, and we must read it again. We must read these things over and over in order to get their impression, and to give them a chance of filtering down into the deeps of our hearts. "I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and I will write upon him, my new name." Here is a promise of the name of my God, the name of the city of my God, and Christ's own new name. The name in the Bible always stood for the character, the essential reality of the person or thing represented. The name of God is all that God is; the name of Christ is all that Christ is in His person, work, and office; and the name of the Holy Spirit is all that He is in His manifold ministry throughout the universe, and especially among believers. Remember that these three names in some sense are to be inscribed on the overcomer as a pillar in the temple of my God. We must be pillars before we can receive this inscription from Christ, and we cannot be pillars

until we are overcomers. The first inscription is the "name of my God." When one inscribed or stamped his name on another, he became the absolute owner of that other. There may be a reference here to the golden plate which flamed in the front of the high priest's head-dress, on which was engraved the sacred and unspoken name of Jehovah. Whether this be the illusion or not, the inscription of the name of God upon the victor makes God the final owner of the victor. We are not our own, for we have been purchased at the price of the blood of Christ. The second inscription here is "the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God." Here is a new Jerusalem in contradistinction from the old Jerusalem; a heavenly Jerusalem in contradistinction from the earthly Jerusalem; and a Jerusalem which has its origin above in contradistinction to the old Jerusalem that had its origin beneath. What is this city? It is the ideal Church of Christ, the complete body of believers, many dead, some living, the Bride, the Lamb's wife, that began coming down from heaven when the first soul was saved, and will return to heaven again when the last soul is effectually called by Divine Grace. To have the name of the city inscribed on the person was a mark and pledge of citizenship with all the privileges and honours attached thereto. The name of the Holy City Jerusalem is stamped upon the victor, marking him, and

identifying him as one with the company of the saved in Christ.

Further, there is the promise of the inscription of Christ's own new name. "And I will write upon him my new name." In another part of the book (19: 11-16), we read about a name of Christ which no man knew but Himself. What is this new name of Christ? What this new name is, I do not think we can fully know here. MacLaren says that the new name of Christ is the sum of the new revelations of what He is, which will flood the souls of the redeemed when they pass from this earth. Believers know a good deal of Christ now, but there are depths in Him no one living on this earth in mortal flesh can fathom. Not until we pass from this life, and possess and experience fully, can we know the depths of wisdom, love, grace, and power, and all the other blessed treasures which are stored up for us in Him. Here we touch but the fringe of His glory; there we will penetrate to the very center of the shining flame. To have Christ's new name inscribed is to have the eternal guarantee of bliss and joy with Him on through the eternities. By His Grace, let us all be victors in the fight, and this promise in its fullness will be ours.

VII

In the letter to the church of Laodicea there are two separate promises, and together they read as

follows (3: 21, 22): "Behold I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him and will sup with him, and he with me. To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me on my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father on his throne." In the verse that contains the first promise Christ is presented in a threefold aspect. We see him there as the Rejected Redeemer, the Suppliant Saviour, and the Patient Benefactor. As the Rejected Redeemer, He is excluded from the building and stands outside the door. This is not so much being excluded and rejected by the individual human heart as it is being expelled from the church as a local organization. He is outside of the door! But what put Him there? It was something inside the church. It was the lukewarmness, self-satisfaction, independence, and pride of the church members. Christ is outside the Church here, and there He stands in the dampness and the darkness, as the patient Son of man, and Son of God, with one hand knocking, and in the other a light, which peradventure might flash through some of its crevices. In that face as He stands there, you will see love wounded and repelled, and pity all but wasted.

But I said, in this promise also, we see the Suppliant Saviour. He is outside the door! What is He there for? What is He doing there? He is standing and knocking. He is knocking with the

end in view of announcing His Presence, and asking for admission. There is some degree of violence as He knocks, or raps, and yet in His hand there is gentleness and authority. Why does He knock? He wants the door opened that He might gain an entrance. He cannot open it Himself, because it is so hung, hinged, and bolted that it can only be opened from within. The lock is on the inside, and so is the latch. But why does the Suppliant Saviour not break down the door and force an entrance? If He did, He would be trampling upon the freedom of the human will, which is a fundamental principle in the nature of the Divine being. Jesus will only enter on a submissive willingness on the part of the individual and the Church to welcome Him as Lord and Master. He has waited long, and is waiting still. Oh, Church of the Living God, you treat no other friend so ill! But how does He knock at the door of the Church, and at the portal of the human heart? He has many ways of knocking, for He raps by His Providential dealings, adverse circumstances, the law from Mount Sinai, and His judgments of many kinds. Sometimes He knocks so hard, and with such violence, that He shakes the whole building to its foundations, and yet many will not rise to open the door and let Him in.

Further, we see Christ in this verse as the Patient Benefactor. Not only is He standing there and knocking, but He is speaking as well. He

calls in through the hand-hole of the portal, and says, "If *any* man." He does not care what man. He is after the individual man, woman, or child. It makes no difference to Him about the colour, age, race, intelligence, character, or social status of the individual. "If any man *hear* my voice." In the first chapter of this book, the voice of Jesus was both like the clear peal of the trumpet, and the sound of many waters. The voice of Jesus has a wonderful range, for He speaks in history, in nature, in Revelation, as well as in the experiences and conditions of human life. There are many voices in the earth, but that of the Lord can be distinguished from them all. He says here, if any man hear my voice, to understand it, and respond to it, by opening the door of faith, "I will come in to him." This is a personal matter, you see. He promises to come into that man alone, irrespective of the self-satisfaction, independence, pride, and unfaithfulness of all the other members of the church. He offers to hold friendship and communion with that man or woman alone. For Christ to come in to an individual member of the church is for Him to make that member a friend, companion, and representative of His. He says, "I will sup with him." This is the only place in the Revelation where the word "sup" is used, and it signifies to dine or feast as if partaking of the chief meal of the day. Christ here promises to become a Guest of that man who will hear His voice,

open the door, and let Him in. He offers to partake of that which that man can provide. Christ is hungry at that door, and He needs what that man can provide. But He can only partake of it by being allowed an entrance into that man's life. That man has faith, hope, love, obedience, service, and even suffering for Christ, and the Suppliant Saviour is eagerly desirous of them all.

Christ does not only promise to become a Guest of that man, thus making him His host thereby, but He promises to make that man His guest, He to become his Host thereby. Not only is the man to sup with Christ, but Christ is to sup or feast with that man. Not only did He want to partake of what that man could provide, but He desired that man to partake of what He could provide. As Christ stood knocking there at that door He was laden with provisions to satisfy the need of the one who would hear His voice, open the door and let Him in. He had gold, the gold of true wisdom, which makes all men rich who receive it; white raiment, the emblem of unsullied purity of character, and medicine for the eyes, which illustrated spiritual perception to understand the deep things of God. Yes, Christ offered Himself for the full satisfaction of every spiritual, moral, and intellectual desire of the soul of the one who would permit Him an entrance. Christ, the Rejected Redeemer, the Suppliant Saviour, and the Patient Benefactor, stands outside the door to-day, and knocks, speaks,

and calls to every church and to every individual in the church, and says, "If any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me."

In the first promise, in this letter, there is a pledge of a feast; in the second promise, there is a guarantee of a throne. A feast, then a throne! Think of it! "To him that overcometh, will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne." Notice the condition of this promise. It is to him that overcometh, "even as I also overcame." Christ then did sometime overcome. Then, He was in the conflict, and the announcement is that He achieved gloriously. The conflict that He was engaged in was no sham battle. He also overcame! This He did in the long ago, when He dwelt among men in mortal human flesh. When in the Passover Chamber, He reassured and cheered His disciples by announcing unto them, "I have overcome the world" (John 16: 33). Yes, Christ gained the victory over the world, the flesh, sin, the devil, and death. From beginning to end, while in mortal human flesh, His life was a victorious one. He routed all the hosts of darkness, making an exhibition of them, and that publicly. The victor here is to overcome now, even as Christ overcame then, and he can only do so by making the victory that Christ won his own by faith.

"I will grant to sit with me on my throne."

This is an illustration taken from the custom of ancient times. There are several thrones mentioned in the Bible; the throne of the priest representing authority in religion; the throne of the judge, representing authority in the realm of justice; the throne of the teacher, representing authority in the realm of knowledge; the throne of the military chief, representing authority in the realm of power; and the throne of the king, representing authority in the realm of politics. For one to sit with the priest on his throne was to share the authority of the priest in the realm of religion; for one to sit with the judge upon his throne was to share with the judge his authority in the realm of justice; for one to sit with the teacher was to share his authority in the realm of knowledge and truth; for one to sit with the military chief on his throne, was to share with him the results of his conquest; and for one to sit with the king on his throne, was to share with him his government, dominion, rule, sovereignty. The throne mentioned in this passage is the throne of the military chief, for there is a conflict, and there is a victory achieved in that conflict. When Christ went home on high, and took His seat on the throne with the Father, He came to share with the Father His dominion, His government, His sovereignty. Up to the time of Christ's Ascension to glory He did not, as man, occupy the throne of God, but, from the time of the Ascension to this moment, and on into the fu-

ture, He occupies with God the throne of sovereignty, and wields all the forces of Deity. Now, what Christ Himself entered upon when He ascended to glory, as a result of the victory He won here, He promises to every one who will overcome in His Name. It is a pledge that the victor should share in the benefits of His conquest, even as He is sharing in the benefits of His Father's conquest. So to every victor, man, woman, or child, of any race and any colour, Christ pledges, "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame and am set down with my Father on his throne."

VI

THEIR CONCLUSION

(*Revelation 2: 7, 11, 17, 29; 3: 6, 13, 22.*)

THE words "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches," are used seven different times in these letters. They constitute the conclusion and appeal of each one of the messages. In the first three letters, these words are introduced before the promise to the victor; in the final four letters, they follow upon the promise to the victor. There have been different reasons given for this change, and none of them are universally satisfactory. The one that has gained the most favour is that the change is made at the point where evil becomes pronounced and established within the bounds of the Church. It is claimed that in the first, second, and third messages, this call to earnest and practical attention is addressed to the people from within, while the appeal in the fourth, fifth, sixth, and seventh letters is addressed to them from without. According to this idea, in the first three messages, Christ is on the inside of the Church, and in the final four He is on the outside. But it is remembered that Professor Ramsey takes the ground that the conclusion of these letters which is

given us in a picture of Christ being locked outside, belongs to all the churches, and hence Christ is set forth here as being excluded from the whole Church of God as she appears on the field of history. But to my mind, this idea is contradicted by the thought elsewhere expressed in the letters of Christ being seen in the midst of the churches. Whether this or some other view of the change be the true one, the appeal itself, as connected with these messages generally, has some very important lessons for us to-day. In our concluding study of these precious gems of truth, we will gather up some of these lessons. What would our Lord teach us from this appeal?

I

The first lesson that we have here is that Jesus Christ, our Risen Lord, has spoken a very definite message to His Church. In ancient days, God spoke by distinct messages and various methods, to the fathers by the Prophets. But in this day of Grace, God has spoken to man through His Son, whom He appointed the Possessor of all things, and for Whose sake He connected, arranged, and adapted the ages (Heb. 1: 1, 2). When Christ was here in mortal flesh He spoke to men by His birth, baptism, character, teachings, works, death, resurrection, and ascension to glory. It was true that He spoke to man through nature, thereby exhibiting His glory, even His wisdom, power and

Deity. It is also true that God spoke to man very definitely through His Son, in the whole of Revelation, and especially in these sublime letters. Let us then keep in mind and believe strongly that we have a genuine message from God, and that it is superlative wisdom for us to give that message our earnest, concentrated, and practical attention. It was for this reason that Christ said, "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches."

II

In the second place, this concluding appeal teaches that the Holy Spirit, the Divine Agent of Christ's message to men, is a true and proper Person. There are eighteen passages in this entire book where the Holy Spirit is mentioned by name, and of that number, eight of them are found in these letters. Three times (1: 4; 3: 1; 5: 6) He is described by the symbolism of number, "The *seven* Spirits of God," which form of speech sets forth the absolute perfection of His character, offices, and work. Seven times in the letters we read, "The Spirit saith unto the churches." The word "saith" is from "lego," which means, "lay forth," "relate in words" as in a logical systematic discourse, or to tell, show, utter, or speak by use of language or symbols. Behind logical address spoken, or written, there is the thinking, reasoning faculty which speaks of knowledge and intelligence.

In fact, these letters are so arranged as to their parts, and their connection with each other, that they manifest the loving heart, the reasoning intellect, and the determining will.

This is not the only time in the Bible that we have it recorded that the Holy Spirit spoke. He spoke to Philip (Acts 8: 29), saying, clearly and definitely, "Go near and join thyself to this chariot." Philip understood His voice and message and obeyed without question. While Peter thought upon the vision (Acts 10: 19, 20) the Spirit said unto him, "Behold three men seek thee. Arise therefore, and get thee down, and go with them, doubting nothing: for I have sent them." How did the Holy Spirit speak thus to Peter and to Philip, I do not know. It is sufficient that He spoke to them, and that they understood and obeyed His voice. He spoke very definitely also to the praying group in the church of Antioch (Acts 13: 2) saying, "Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them." "I have called them," therefore, separate them to the work, a declaration and a command. How did the Holy Spirit speak at that time, we do not know and we cannot tell. The fact that He spoke at all in such a clear, definite, and logical manner, shows unmistakably that He is a true and proper Person, for He thinks, knows, feels, teaches, speaks, and makes intercession. Great dishonour is done the Holy Spirit when He is not considered a true and

proper Person by those who profess to love and serve Christ. This is one way of insulting Him, ignoring Him, despising and tempting Him. The messages that Christ sent to the churches in Asia Minor were inspired and authenticated by the Holy Spirit, the third Person in the Godhead.

III

There is another lesson that the Lord Jesus Christ would have us learn from this concluding appeal. It is that the matters about which He speaks are of transcendent and universal importance to Christian people. It is of interest to note just when and how these words were used in the New Testament, for in no less than fourteen different times, in little differences of form, they are used. They are always on the lips of our Lord, and that when He had very important truths to emphasize. When He would have the disciples understand the character and mission of His forerunner, John the Baptist, He said (Matt. 11: 15), "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear." When He would have His disciples understand the fate of His Word, in the social order throughout this age, and the mixed character of His Kingdom in the dispensation (Matt. 13: 9, 43), He said, "Who hath ears to hear, let him hear." When He would explain the blessed influence of a holy, Christian character, and the importance of letting our light shine, He said (Mark 4: 23), "If any man have

ears to hear, let him hear." When He would show the evil of the human heart, and declare the secret operations of Divine Grace therein, He called the people's earnest attention to the truth by saying (Mark 7: 16), "If any man have ears to hear, let him hear." When He would set forth the tragedy of a lost Christian influence, He would emphasize and enforce it by making the appeal (Luke 14: 35), "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear." Further, when the Risen Lord wanted to illustrate the origin, character, authority, and demoniacal might and cruelty of the world power for this whole dispensation, He did so by a composite, supernatural sea monster, and said, "If any man have an ear, let him hear" (Rev. 13: 9).

And no less than seven times did He use these words in these letters, thus indicating that the truths presented are of transcendent, vital, and practical importance for the whole Christian Church. In these messages, He said much about His own person and work, His death, resurrection, and session at the right hand of God. He also spoke frequently of repentance, faith, obedience, holiness, and coming glory. He said much about His own work, and their work, and the suffering of each for the praise of God. He also mentioned the fortunes of His Church in this age, and His glorious Second Coming at the end of the age, frequently. All of these truths were important to the Christians then, and they are vitally important to

the Christians now, and hence, by the Spirit, He said repeatedly, "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches."

IV.

Not only do these words teach us that Christ has definitely spoken, that the Holy Spirit is a proper Person, and that the words that Christ has spoken are of transcendent and vital importance, but they also teach that these messages from the Lord have a limited, particular, as well as a general appeal. There are parts of the Bible that contain messages only for Israel, God's national people; parts that contain messages for the lost world universally, and there are parts that contain messages distinctively for the saved only, whether they be Jews or Gentiles. These messages are addressed to the *churches*, which churches represent the whole visible body of Christ. And yet we find that there is a particular appeal made in each case showing that all who are in the churches have not the capacity for hearing these messages. The words are, "He that hath an *ear*, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches." The implication is that there were some in those churches that did not have ears. The Lord was not talking about the physical ear, for doubtless they all had such, though some of them might have been deaf. He was talking about the ear of the soul which is always faith, and all members of the churches do not possess such a ca-

capacity. The Word of God, generally speaking, is not addressed to reason, though it calls into exercise the reasoning faculties. It is not addressed to experience, though it produces an experience within those who receive it. But it is addressed primarily to faith, and to faith only. In secular study, we must understand before we can believe; in spiritual study, we must believe before we can understand. The ear of the soul is faith responding to, and trusting in what the Lord has spoken, and all professed Christians have not such a faith. Some never had it; others had it, and lost it. It is impossible for one who is only born of nature, to understand the deep things, or the secrets, plans, and purposes of God, for they are utter folly unto all such (1 Cor. 2: 14). The ear of the soul is a kind of sixth sense, supernaturally bestowed, and without this sixth sense, even though there be profound secular education, it is impossible to fathom the mysteries of Divine Grace. For who among men knoweth the inner thoughts and purposes of man, save the spirit or purpose of the man himself? Even so the thoughts, plans, and purposes of God none knoweth except by the Spirit of God. These messages then are addressed only to those who have ears to hear, and they are found in the midst of the churches.

V.

Furthermore, we are plainly taught in these con-

cluding words that though these messages have a particular and limited appeal, they are intensely personal and individual in their application. Notice again how these words read. "*He* that hath an ear, let him hear." It is not "*They* that have ears let them hear." The promises are all personal and individual, for they read in each case, "*He* that overcometh." The commendations, complaints, and counsels contained in these messages are sometimes for individuals, sometimes for groups, and sometimes for the whole local church addressed. But not so with the promises and the appeals. They are invariably addressed to individuals. The appeal in each case here is addressed to each one that has an ear, separately and alone. This is always Christ's method in the application and the operation of His Grace. He saves men and women one by one. God justifies men and women before Himself on faith, not in masses, but one by one. Hearing to understand, and to obey, by self-determined choice, is always a personal thing. It cannot exist apart from the one who hears. Others cannot hear for us if we do not hear for ourselves. One man cannot see for another man, and neither can one sleep for another. One man cannot believe, repent, and be baptized for another. Each must do his own repenting, believing, obeying, and serving, just as each must stand for himself before the judgment seat of Christ. The husband cannot believe and repent

for the wife, and neither can the wife for the husband. The parents cannot repent and believe for the children, and neither can the children for the parents. The minister cannot repent and believe for the people, and neither can the people repent and believe for the minister. No, no, each must repent for himself, believe for himself, be born from above for himself, be baptized for himself, join the Church himself, then serve Christ for himself, for it is "*He* that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches."

VI

There is a sixth lesson in these words. It is plainly implied by them that it is possible to have the ear of faith for the Lord's messages, and yet not to hear those messages to understand them. Again they read, "*He* that hath an ear, *let* him hear." The word "*let*" is the old English word having the meaning of "*hinder*." In one passage we read (1 Thess. 2:7), "*He* that letteth, will let," meaning he that hindereth or restraineth will hinder or restrain. One may hinder or restrain himself from hearing though he may have good ears. The sense of hearing may be perfect, speaking naturally, and yet there may not be a sound or symphony reach the deeps of the soul. Jesus spoke of certain ones (Matt. 13:15) whose ears had become dull of hearing, whose eyes they had closed, and whose hearts had waxed gross, and so

were incapable to understand spiritual things. They had closed their own ears, and had stopped their own eyes. This is the meaning of the warning of the apostle in Hebrews (3: 7, 8) when he says, "To-day if you will hear his voice, harden not your hearts."

Then, it is possible for God's people to have the ears of faith and yet not to hear these messages of Christ. There is a danger of hindering or restraining our sense of hearing, and hence the appeal before us. We may hinder our sense of spiritual hearing by listening to other voices. The boilermaker cannot hear because of the noise in the midst of which he is compelled to work. The people of God may hinder their sense of hearing by not responding to the voice of Christ with obedience when He speaks. That young man did not hear the alarm because he did not respond to it for the second and third time. If we obey what Christ speaks, He will speak to us again and again. The people of God may hinder their hearing of Christ's message by a determination not to hear. They may stop their ears, and stiffen their necks against His Word. Further, they may hinder their sense of hearing and restrain themselves from listening to His voice, by giving attention to other things. That good old bishop did not hear the ripples that lapped at his feet, as he drove slowly around the lake, for the reason that his mind and heart were fixed on the address that he was to deliver at the

Conference. If the people of God give their concentrated attention to the joys of pleasure, to the benefits of position, to the honour of society, or to any other thing whatsoever, they may not hear the voice of Jesus when He speaks. We are solemnly warned not to restrain ourselves or to hinder ourselves in any way from listening to the messages of Jesus as they are presented in these wonderful letters from heaven. "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches."

VII

The final lesson suggested by these words is that the messages of Christ delivered to the churches in these letters are to be practically exemplified in life and conduct. To truly *hear* what the Spirit saith, is to believe, study, meditate upon, understand, and practically obey the word spoken. This is surely what is meant by hearing the words of this prophecy, mentioned elsewhere (1:3). There is the hearing of indifference, and the hearing of superficial regard, yes, and the hearing that promises much in the future, but these are not the kinds of hearing mentioned in this appeal. This is the hearing that gives earnest, concentrated, and fixed attention, that shuts out all other sounds and voices, that takes the matter to the heart, even to the depths of the soul, that prevents absolutely nothing to interfere with a direct and persevering conformity to that which is uttered, and a hearing

that stirs the emotions, that informs the intellect, and that persuades the will. One cannot hear, according to the teaching of this appeal, without practicing in his life the full significance of the message uttered. In these wonderful letters, gems of precious truth, in these precious Pearls from Patmos, we have revelations, commendations, complaints, counsels, and glorious promises for the present and the future, and to hear them truly would be to practically translate them into a good conduct and a holy life.

“HE THAT HATH AN EAR, LET HIM HEAR WHAT THE SPIRIT SAITH UNTO THE CHURCHES.”



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